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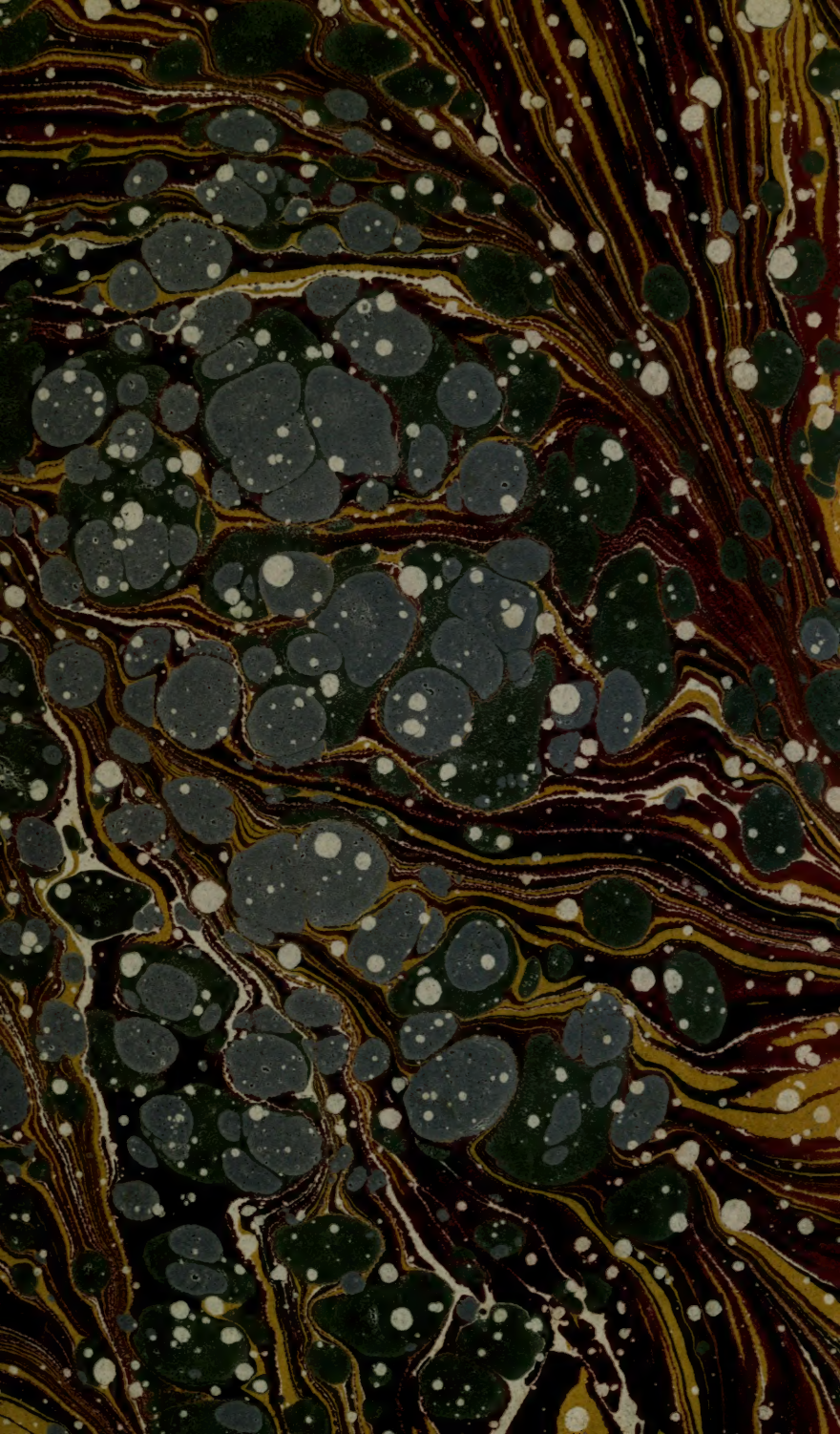


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AN
ILLUSTRATION

OF
THE METHOD OF EXPLAINING

THE
NEW TESTAMENT

BY THE EARLY OPINIONS OF JEWS AND CHRISTIANS
CONCERNING CHRIST.

BY WILLIAM WILSON, B. D.

LATE FELLOW OF ST JOHN'S COLLEGE,
CAMBRIDGE.

A NEW EDITION CAREFULLY REVISED.

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ADVERTISEMENT
TO
THE PRESENT EDITION.

WILLIAM WILSON, the author of the following work, was admitted a member of St John's College, Cambridge, in the year 1779. He took the degree of B.A. in 1784, on which occasion he was the third wrangler; and proceeded regularly to the degree of M.A. in 1787, and that of B.D. in 1794.

In the year 1788, he was elected a Fellow of St John's College. From that period, he devoted himself to Theological studies; which were terminated by his death in 1800, at the early age of thirty-eight.

In the year 1797, Mr Wilson published his *Illustration of the method of explaining the New Testament, by the early opinions of Jews and Christians concerning Christ*—the only work, it is believed, which he committed to the press. That work speedily attracted the notice of Dr Pretyman (Tomline), then Bishop of Lincoln; and his Lordship is understood to have strongly recom-

mended the author to the attention of Mr Pitt. The consequence was, that the Premier presented Mr Wilson to a Living; to which, at the time of his death, he was about to remove.

Several persons, who were intimately acquainted with Mr Wilson, are still residing in this University; and they all speak of him in terms of the greatest respect and kindness—as a man of talents and learning, of exemplary conduct and amiable disposition.

The Editor of the present edition of Mr Wilson's *Illustration* is not without hopes that, by means of this republication, the work may become more extensively known than it has hitherto been. It is, in his estimation, one of the most valuable productions that have ever appeared on any subject.

T. T.

CAMBRIDGE,

25 May, 1838.

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AN
ILLUSTRATION,
&c.

CHAPTER I.

1. Importance of the Inquiry into the grounds of Jesus Christ's Condemnation.
2. Expectations of the Jewish nation. 3. Their principal reason for believing Jesus an impostor would be their principal motive for condemning him to death. 4. Inquiry into the grounds of his condemnation.

I. THE crucifixion of Jesus Christ by the inhabitants of Jerusalem is the most important event that the world has ever witnessed; not only because the eternal happiness of a future life was to be effected by it, but because it has already been followed by a total change in the sentiments and manners of a great and increasing portion of the human race. On these accounts, a regular investigation of the causes and circumstances of this event would not only be a proper employment for the theological writer, whose duty is to explain and "vindicate the ways of God to man"—but for the historical inquirer also, who purposes to develope the efficient though distant causes of great revolutions in the affairs of mankind, and to scrutinize the motives of the agents, by whose instrumentality they are brought about.

II. To form a just notion of the motives of the Jews, it will be necessary to attend to one of the national opinions at the period when Jesus announced his character and office. They were then subject to the Romans; but, on the authority of some of their ancient prophecies, written in a language which had long ceased to be familiar to them, and therefore more easily misunderstood, they expected the appearance of a Deliverer, to overturn the Roman power, and to place them at the head of all the nations of the earth. This great personage was described in their own language under the title of Messiah; and in Greek under the synonymous appellation of Christ. Whether they looked for a mere man, distinguished above all others by the favour and supernatural assistance of God, or a being more than human, has in modern times been a matter of some dispute. The earliest Christian writers after the Apostolic age have informed us that the Jews of those times, like their posterity in succeeding ages, expected, for their Messiah, a human King and Prophet; and the single testimony of the Jew in Justin Martyr, a Samaritan, confirmed by the acquiescence of Justin himself, only a century after the death of Christ, might be thought sufficient to preclude all disagreement and doubt on the subject¹. The question, however, became much agitated in the last Century; and the names, more

¹ Trypho, the Jew in the Dialogue, says, καὶ γὰρ πάντες ἡμεῖς τὸν Χριστὸν ἄνθρωπον ἐξ ἀνθρώπων προσδοκῶμεν γενήσεσθαι—"We all expect that Christ will be a man born of human parents." p. 235. Edit. Thirlby.

than the arguments, of Pearson, Bull, Pococke, Allix and Kidder, who maintained that the Jews expected the Second Person in the Divine Trinity, give some authority to the opinion of Dr Horsley, Mr Howes and Mr Whitaker, in our times. After the elaborate disquisitions of Bull and Allix—Basnage, in his “History of the Jews,” was necessarily led to examine carefully into the ancient opinions of their nation relating to the Messiah². His arguments are conclusive; and he thus expresses the result of his inquiry. “The means, which the Jewish church had, to know the Messiah, had been more effectual, if the Divinity of the Messiah had been a constant tenet among the Jews, as some learned men have endeavoured to prove. As their arguments have a great shew of reason, we have thought them worth mentioning. But notwithstanding it is our interest to be of their opinion, which besides strongly concludes against the Antitrinitarians, yet we could not be induced to father on the Jews a tenet which they never received, and thereby make their incredulity, which is but too deplorable, more criminal than it really is³.” The decision of Basnage is sanctioned by the concurrence of many critical scholars before, and since his time; and a living writer, though baffled in his great attempt to prove the doctrine of Christ’s Divinity a corruption of Christianity, has, however, succeeded in confirming Basnage’s sentence by additional evidence. Justice must

² Book iv. c. 24.

³ Basnage, Preface, p. 7. Taylor’s translation.

allow to the first two sections of his third Book¹, what candour cannot admit in most of his History, that he has fully proved his point.

III. Such were the expectations of the Jews, when Jesus appeared among them, to assert the title and character of the Messiah, and to correct their errors on that subject. He appealed to miracles, and to the completion of prophecies in his person, to confirm his claims: the conduct of a numerous body of followers fully proved their belief in the existence of his miracles; which appear not to have been doubted by the unbelieving Jews themselves:—yet he was rejected as a false Messiah, and put to death as a blasphemer. From the consideration of the unrelenting severity of his persecutors, an argument has been formed against their belief in the Christian miracles²; but the objection has only arisen from extreme inattention to the motives by which their conduct was influenced. Their principal reason for believing Jesus an impostor would, undoubtedly, be also the great motive for condemning him to death; and to ascertain this, we are naturally led to examine all the accounts of his trial, which have come down to us. Here the materials are abundant. Four contemporaries and followers of Christ have written at large on the same subject. Where the account of one is abridged, that of another is diffuse; where

¹ "History of early Opinions concerning Jesus Christ," by Dr Priestley.

² See "The Jewish and Heathen Rejection of the Christian Miracles," by Dr Edwards, p. 8—10.

one is obscure, some of the others are clear: and the truth may be collected with ease and certainty by a comparative view of these ample documents.

IV. He was arraigned, it appears, before the two different tribunals of the Jewish Sanhedrim, and the Roman governor. In the latter he was accused of sedition, and acquitted³; in the former he was accused of blasphemy, and condemned⁴: and though the judicial power of the Jewish court was at that time much abridged, the Roman governor was prevailed on, by the importunity of the Jews, to ratify and execute the sentence of the Sanhedrim. The conduct of the Jews on this occasion appears to have been determined by the different claims which Jesus had advanced. He had sometimes simply declared himself Christ or Messiah, viz. the King of Israel foretold by their prophets; and sometimes, Christ the Son of God. The assumption of the first of these titles combined with another circumstance, that of being sometimes followed by great multitudes of people, might seem treason against the sovereignty of the Romans: and of this combination of alleged guilt he was accused before Pilate;—"We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar, saying, that he himself is Christ, a King:"—"He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee to this place⁵."—But,

³ John xviii. 38. and xix. 4.

⁴ Matthew xxvi. 65, 66. See also the corresponding accounts of Mark and Luke.

⁵ Luke xxiii. 2, 5.

to discover what they conceived to be his real offence, we must refer to the proceedings of their own tribunal. There, we are informed, after the court had in vain attempted to prove him guilty of blasphemy by the rules of evidence laid down in the Mosaic law, that a confession of his supposed guilt was drawn from him by the High Priest's examination. With respect to the examination of witnesses, St Matthew has related that "the Council sought false witness against Jesus to put him to death: yet found they none, though many false witnesses came¹." According to St Mark, "the Council sought for witnesses against Jesus to put him to death; and found none: for many bare false witness against him, but their witness agreed not together²." The obscurity of the first Evangelist is well explained by the second. The Sanhedrim, it appears, sought for witnesses to convict Jesus of a capital crime. On examination, they proved to be false witnesses, either by the inconsistency or the weakness of their evidence; and therefore, by the Law of Moses, could have no weight with the court. By the Mosaic Law, the concurrent testimony of two or three witnesses was necessary to convict any one of a capital crime³; and at last "came two witnesses," to testify that Jesus had threatened to destroy the temple, and build it again

¹ Matth. xxvi. 59, 60.

² Mark xiv. 55, 56. *Ἰσαι αἱ μαρτυρίαι οὐκ ἦσαν*. Perhaps, the true translation is—"their testimonies were insufficient." See Grotius on the term *ἴσαι*.

³ Numbers xxxv. 30. Deut. xvii. 6.

in three days: but, either a slight disagreement in their testimony annulled the force of their evidence; or, what is more probable, the fact substantiated was not thought to amount to a capital offence. Testimony sufficient to convict a culprit might be said to be true, insufficient testimony false, in the eye of the Law. In this language St John remarks, "It is written in your law, that the testimony of two men is true:" and it must be according to the same sort of phraseology that these witnesses are called "false witnesses;" for the only fact mentioned, to which they deposed, appears to have been strictly true, but not sufficient to prove the crime of blasphemy⁴. Having failed in establishing this charge, the High Priest asks, however, for a reply; expecting, perhaps, to meet with some objectionable matter in a long defence⁵. Having failed in this also, he proceeds to examine Jesus, in order to draw from him an acknowledgment of his supposed guilt; and this he effected. According to St Luke, our Saviour was asked two questions. In Matthew and Mark these are expressed in one, probably for the sake of bre-

⁴ "Ideo falsi testes, quia quæ vera fortassis erant tanquam crimina et maleficia objiciebant." Estius in Matt. xxvi. 61. See also Wakefield's note on this passage; and Grotius on Mark xiv. 55.

⁵ "Videbat Caiaphas ne illud quidem factum, quod maximè ad invidiam Christi pertinebat, sufficere ad damnationem: quod Marcus dixit ἰσαι αἱ μαρτυρίαι οὐκ ἦσαν. Nihil enim mali Templo ominabatur, etiam qui demolituum se dicit, si et restitutum se addat: neque pollicitatio, utcunque vana, capite erat luenda. Itaque testimoniis aliorum diffusus, quærit ex ipsius ore aliquid elicere quod ipsum oneret. Sperabat enim in proluxâ defensione facilè aliquid repertum iri εὐδιάβλητον. Grotius in Matt. xxvi. 62. See also Hammond on Mark xiv. 56.

vity: and from these two Evangelists, it cannot be certainly known, whether he was condemned for declaring himself the Christ, or the Son of God, or for asserting that he should afterwards appear with glory at the right hand of God. The doubt, however, is removed in the narrative of Luke. "As soon as it was day, the elders of the people and the chief priests and the scribes came together, and led him into their council, saying, Art thou the Christ? tell us. And he said unto them, If I tell you, ye will not believe; and if I also ask you, ye will not answer me, nor let me go. Hereafter shall the Son of man sit on the right hand of the power of God. Then said they *all*, Art thou then the Son of God? And he said unto them, Ye say that I am. And they said, What need we any further¹ witness? for we ourselves have heard of his own mouth²." "The High Priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? Behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy: what think ye? They answered and said, He is guilty of death³." The real ground of his condemnation also appears from a circumstance mentioned by St John, in his account of the second trial. The Jews exclaimed to Pilate, "We have a Law, and by *our Law* he ought to die, because he made himself the

¹ From this expression it appears, consistently with the whole account of the trial, that till then further evidence was thought necessary. This may also be collected from the silence of St Luke, no less than by his testimony. He has not even mentioned the examination of the witnesses.

² Luke xxii. 66—71.

³ Matt. xxvi. 65.

Son of God⁴." It appears then, by very full and decisive evidence, that Jesus was accused by the Jews, before the *Roman* governor, for assuming the title of the Christ, or Messiah, a King; and that, in a *Jewish* court, he was adjudged guilty of the capital crime of blasphemy, by the Mosaic Law, for simply declaring himself the Son of God. His claim to this title was not set aside by any additional evidence; but the simple assumption of the title not only invalidated his pretensions to the character of the Messiah, but was in itself the crime for which he suffered. If then it can be clearly ascertained in what sense these words were understood by the Jews; the only ground of his condemnation, and the principal cause of their rejection of his claims, will be at once determined.

⁴ John xix. 7.

CHAPTER II.

1. Different significations of the Phrase, "Son of God." Proposal of the question, In what sense it is applied to Jesus Christ in the New Testament? 2. Argument to prove that it implied his Divinity, from considering the probable object of his trial. 3. Second argument, from considering the nature of the crime for which he suffered. Opinions of Grotius and others on this subject. 4. Third argument, from considering the Law by which he was condemned. Jesus Christ condemned by the Law of Moses. No Law in the Pentateuch or Misna against any one declaring himself the Son of God, unless the phrase be supposed to imply Divinity. Whether Jesus was condemned by the Law in the 18th Chapter of Deuteronomy. The opinion of Grotius. Opinions of others. 5. Objection against the miracles of Christ considered. The Jews suppose Christ to have been condemned by the Law in the 13th Chapter of Deuteronomy. Inconsistency of two objections against the Christian miracles. 6. Fourth argument, from comparing the proceedings of the Sanhedrim with the conduct of the Jewish people on different occasions. Whether the Fathers have denied that Jesus Christ taught his own Divinity and Pre-existence. The reason assigned by them, for the caution of Christ and the Apostles, satisfactory; and affords no presumption against the reality of these doctrines. Apparent inconsistency in the conduct of the Jewish People accounted for.

I. To discover in what sense the phrase, "Son of God," is applied to our Saviour in the New Testament, it has sometimes been thought sufficient to search the Old and New Testament for passages, where it is used to signify a prophet, a virtuous man, an Israelite, a Christian, or any man like ourselves; and to select a meaning that suits best with the writer's preconceived opinion. Others, because the term admits of various significations, seem to have thought it impossible to determine in what sense it is actually applied to Jesus Christ. But this important question is neither to be so summarily

decided, nor so indolently abandoned. The Jews pronounced Jesus guilty of a capital crime by their Law, because he had declared himself the Son of God; and we shall in vain search for any written statute, or any traditionary maxim, making it blasphemy and death for any one to declare himself, in metaphorical language, a virtuous man, an Israelite, a man favoured by God, or a mere man like ourselves. No one acquainted with the state of opinion, at that time, in Judea, or, who has attended to the evangelical history of John the Baptist and our Saviour, will affirm that the Jews would condemn any man to death for simply declaring himself, in metaphorical language, a prophet inspired and commissioned by God. All knew John to be a prophet: Christ, in the opinion of some, was John risen from the dead: according to others, he was one of the ancient Prophets. When the chief priests and Pharisees sought to seize him, they feared the multitude; because they believed him to be a prophet. He appears to have been publicly called "Jesus the prophet of Nazareth;" and what was very commonly believed and publicly declared, it could not be blasphemy, and a capital crime, for him to speak. Without giving any attention then, where none is necessary, to those other acceptations, of which the expression will merely admit—it will be sufficient to inquire, whether the phrase, when applied to our Saviour in the New Testament, was supposed to express his divine mission, or his divine nature: whether it was used as the title of an office, synony-

mously with the word Christ or Messiah: or whether Jesus, in announcing himself the Son of God, was not understood to speak of his own Divinity.

II. If we try to explain the conduct of the Jewish magistrates, by comparing it with the opinions then prevalent of an expected Messiah, and by considering the probable object of the trial in their court—it is difficult to suppose our Saviour, under all the disadvantages of an humble appearance, condemned for acknowledging himself to be the Messiah, either in direct, or indirect terms. They were prejudiced against him, it is allowed, on several accounts. After a slight deviation from the rigid observance of their sabbath, they had even consulted by what means they might put him to death¹; but, after a tedious and fruitless examination of many witnesses, it was only by the declaration drawn from him at his trial, that they were enabled to accomplish their purpose. This acknowledgment alone, without any further evidence whatever, according to the unanimous opinion of the supreme court of judicature, consisting of seventy-two persons, constituted in itself a capital crime; though it might be expected that the object of the trial would be to prove the falsehood, not merely the existence of his claim. His judges would probably think it necessary to prove, to their own satisfaction and that of the people whom they feared², either that he wanted some of the characteristic marks of the true Messiah,

¹ John v. 16.

² Matth. xxi. 46.

or that he was distinguished by some positive tokens of imposture. A few centuries later indeed—when the Jews had been disappointed by a succession of pretenders, who had brought on them many grievous calamities—worn out with vexation, they at length pronounced a severe anathema against any one, who should presume to utter any prediction on this subject³; and in the temper of mind, which disappointment of exalted hopes, and the pressure of excessive sufferings, naturally produce, it would not have been wonderful, if they had made it a capital offence for any one to declare himself the Christ. But, in the time of our Saviour, their hopes were fresh; their disappointments had scarcely commenced; and it is hardly conceivable that their supreme court of justice should refer all his guilt to the assumption of the title of a personage, whose appearance they not only thought possible, but ardently expected—and not place it to the account of those other parts of his conduct, which might, in their opinion, prove his claim groundless. Would no individual of this court, of which Nicodemus and Gamaliel were members, have asked the Galilæan stranger, what credentials he could produce to justify his high pretensions? Would no one think of examining witnesses, for the purpose of proving those pretensions groundless? Would none of them think it necessary to shew either by evidence, or his own confession, that his birth-place, or conduct, or doctrines were inconsistent with the character assumed? Would they all be

³ Buxtorf. Synag. Judaic. xxxvi. 442.

satisfied with hearing him simply declare himself the Messiah, and that not directly, but by means of a synonymous term? and could they all immediately pronounce him, on this account, worthy of death? Is it likely that the Sanhedrim should speak with concern and inquietude of his miracles at one of their meetings¹, and not adduce evidence to set aside their effect at another? It is very improbable that the Jews of that age should either so far misinterpret their Law, or establish such a precedent: it is not likely, at a time when they expected a Messiah, that they would be satisfied with proving Jesus to have only arrogated to himself that character. It is more probable that the tribunal would proceed further, by attempting to prove him a false Messiah; and producing evidence either from the examination of witnesses, or his own confession, sufficient to convince both themselves and the people, before they condemned him to death. And, if they considered Jesus to have asserted his divine nature in calling himself the Son of God, they actually took this course. Some leading men among the Jews had before endeavoured to persuade the people, of the futility of his claim, because he had broken the Sabbath²; and the Sanhedrim would probably have received some imperfect, and perhaps inconsistent reports, that he had called God his Father in a more strict and proper sense than was consistent with the notion of his simple humanity; that he had claimed the privilege of forgiving sins, of judging the world, and

¹ John xi. 47.

² John ix. 16.

of dispensing with the observance of the sabbath; that he had spoken in express terms of his own omnipotence and eternity; and that all these claims were, in fact, comprized in one, that he was "the Son of God." The object of the trial would therefore be to establish the falsehood of one claim by the supposed blasphemy of the other. They would at once satisfy themselves and the people, that he was a false Christ, and merited death; because, in declaring himself the Son of God, they conceived him to have claimed Divinity, and on that account, and that only, to be convicted of blasphemy.

On this supposition, that unison in their conduct and sentiments in different ages is observable, which in Jews might be expected. In modern times, they accuse Christians of blasphemy and idolatry for denominating their Christ the Son of God: in the seventh century, they urged the same accusation³: in the fifth century, they urged the first commandment in the decalogue against Christians⁴: in the fourth, Eusebius of Cæsarea⁵ relates, that they would not admit the possibility of the existence of a Son of God: in the beginning of the third century, according to Origen, who had conversed very extensively with Jews on this particular subject⁶, they refused

³ "Leontius (Episcop. Neapoleos Cypri. 5 Sermone pro Christi Theologiâ contra Judæos Concil. Nic. 2. Act. 4. p. 235, &c.) alleges that the Jews ought to be confounded with shame to accuse Christians of Idolatry." Basnage, B. vi. c. 21.

⁴ See Priestley, Hist. of early Opinions, Vol. III. p. 28.

⁵ Demon. Evang. Lib. iv. c. 1.

⁶ Origen cont. Celsum, p. 79. Ed. Spence.

to admit the application of the term, Son of God, to the Messiah¹; and, as it has been somewhere observed by Basnage, the compiler of the Misna indirectly attacks Christians on the same account in the treatise, of which Maimonides has given us a paraphrase: in the middle of the second century, the fictitious Jew of Celsus continually attacks Christ for calling himself God, and Son of God; and ridicules the Christians for believing his claims²: in the beginning of the second century, the Jew in Justin Martyr objects against the Divinity of the Messiah, as a doctrine peculiar to Christians, and repugnant to the notions of his countrymen³: and a century before, the Jews at different times attempted to stone Jesus for alluding to his Divinity, and Pre-existence, and actually condemned him to death for declaring himself the Son of God.

A further consistency, in the conduct of the Jews towards Christ and Christians in different ages, may also be observed. When they only appealed to their own Law, the authority of which was acknowledged by Christians as well as themselves, they have urged the charge of blasphemy and idolatry; and they condemned Jesus to death for the crime of blasphemy, in declaring himself the Son of God. But, when they addressed themselves to the Roman Emperors

¹ Origen cont. Celsum, p. 38. Ed. Spenc.

² See Origen, p. 22, 30, 51, 62, 71, 79, 82, 136, &c. &c.

³ P. 235. Ed. Thirlby. Before Justin wrote his Dialogue, the Jews had calumniated the impious sect, *αἵρεσις τις ἄθεος*, which acknowledged Jesus as Messiah, and a teacher, and Son of God, *Χριστὸν καὶ διδάσκαλον καὶ υἱὸν Θεοῦ*. p. 368.

before the time of Constantine, they accused Christians of a species of treason, in acknowledging and expecting a great King, called Christ, to overthrow the Roman empire, and to rule the whole earth⁴; and they accused our Saviour, to the Roman governor of Judæa, because he made himself Christ, a King, and therefore spoke against Cæsar.

III. To discover the sense in which the Jewish Sanhedrim understood our Saviour to call himself the Son of God, it may not be improper to bestow a little attention on the nature of the crime, for which he was condemned.

The Jewish notions of blasphemy and idolatry appear to have been so nearly allied, that, by one of the maxims of their oral law, the punishment of both crimes was in every particular the same. According to this maxim, the blasphemer and idolater were the only criminals affixed to a cross, after having been stoned to death.—“*Lapidati omnes suspenduntur: verba R. Elieseris. At sapientes aiunt: non suspenditur nisi blasphemus et idololatra*⁵.”

Maimonides, who, in the 12th century, undertook to explain the digest of the oral law agreeably to the spirit of the Talmud, observes on this, “The blasphemer alone was affixed to a cross;” and adds,

⁴ Mosheim, Hist. Eccl. p. 30. and Alb. Fabricius, in luce Evangelii orbi universo exoriente. c. 7, p. 133.

⁵ Misna Tract. de Synedriis, Vol. iv. p. 235. Ed. Surenhusii.

“and an idolater is also called a blasphemer.” These notions of the ancient Jews, on the near affinity of blasphemy to idolatry, perfectly accord with the representation of these crimes in their Sacred Book. The one seems to consist in certain actions committed, the other in words spoken, immediately against the majesty of God; and so slight is their difference, that the word commonly used in the Old Testament to denote one crime seems to have been sometimes applied to the other¹.—But the assumption of the title of the Messiah, a human king and prophet, could have no relation to either of these crimes. It might be considered as an instance of great presumption or gross imposture; but, with Jews, it could be neither idolatry nor blasphemy, to aspire to any human character however exalted: and when the Sanhedrim immediately and unanimously pronounced our Saviour guilty of blasphemy, for calling himself the Son of God, he must have appeared to them to have affected a higher nature than any human being could possess.

To this conclusion we have been led, by comparing the Jewish notions of a Messiah and of blasphemy together, as they are to be collected from their own ancient records. There is also strong negative evidence in the New Testament, that it was not accounted blasphemy by the Jewish magistrates, to acknowledge Jesus as the Christ. If he blasphemed, in the eyes of the Jews, by indirectly declaring himself Christ, the same guilt must have attached on

¹ See Isaiah LXV. 7.

others, who honoured him with that invidious title; whereas, when the two blind men cry out, "Jesus, thou son of David," they are simply rebuked, not stoned as blasphemers. At one time, five thousand men affirm Jesus to be that prophet, who should come into the world; at another, the multitude hails him with Hosannas into Jerusalem as the Messiah: yet none of these are stigmatized with the name, or suffer the severe penalty annexed to blasphemy.

Let all the different significations of the phrase, "Son of God," be enumerated: it is only in one of them, that the application of it to any individual could amount (in the opinion of the ancient Jews) to the crime for which Jesus suffered. But if, according to its most obvious meaning, it be thought to imply Divinity; the Jews, it may easily be supposed, would pronounce Jesus a blasphemer for claiming a property, which they admitted in the One Jehovah only.

It would be easy to fortify this reasoning and conclusion with a crowd of authorities. I shall be content with a few: first producing the opposite opinion of Grotius; who, with Erasmus, Limborch and others, supposed Jesus to have been condemned for indirectly declaring himself the Messiah or Christ.

"Βλασφημίαν vocat Pontifex quòd Jesus se Christum profiteretur: et sanè erat ni Christus fuisset." Observe his reason: "Nam qui sibi eam potestatem falsò arrogat, in Deum est contumeliosus²."

² N. in Matt. xxvi. 65.

“Non intelligit *filius Dei* adoptionis excellentiâ, qualem credebat fore Christum; sed *filius Dei* generatione divinâ, qualem non credebat quidem fore Christum; sed intellexerat (sc. Pontifex) Jesum et se esse dicere, et a discipulis haberi:.....et quidem duo rogat Jesum, prout confessio Petri et discipulorum duo continebat, an sit Christus, et an sit naturâ filius Dei¹.”

“Qui filium Dei naturâ se facit, alium Deum invehit contra legem², et blasphemiae reus est³.”

“Princeps sacerdotum duo interrogat; unum, an esset Christus, nam Christum Judæi expectabant; alterum, an esset filius Dei, *quod quidem Judæis, scripturas non intelligentibus, longè erat odiosius*: Nam mysterium Trinitatis nesciebant; et quia filium Dei propriè intelligebant, scilicet, naturalem filium: idè, ex eo quod Christus diceret aut significaret se filium Dei, colligebant, quod æqualem se faceret Deo. Hinc statim exclamavit pontifex ‘Blasphemavit,’ i.e. dixit injuriam Deo, cui se fecit æqualem, affirmando se filium Dei. Nam illud ‘Blasphemavit,’ non puto referendum ad illud, quod se Christum fateretur; verè enim Christum expectabant Judæi; sed quod se fateretur esse filium Dei. Nam Christum purum hominem existimant, et filium Dei omninò negant⁴.”

“They conclude Christ guilty of blasphemy, and consequently of death, because he styled himself the Son of God, not in their sense, in which they allowed

¹ Lucas Brugensis in Matt. xxvi. 63.

² Deut. vi. 4.

³ Lucas Brugen. in Joh. xix. 7.

⁴ Estius in Matt. xxvi. 63.

that of the Psalmist to belong to him⁵, but, in his own: i. e. because, being a man, he made himself God⁶. Whence it is manifest, 1. that in the sense of the Jews, to own himself the Son of God, and to make himself God, was the same thing. 2. Hence also it is certain, that the Jews of that age did not think the Messiah was to be God, but only a man, who could not challenge to himself Divinity: seeing they never conclude him a blasphemer, because he said he was the Christ, but only because he said he was the Son of God; by that, making himself equal with God⁷."

IV. To prove that Jesus Christ was tried and condemned by the Mosaic Law, it is sufficient to observe that his trial was before a Jewish court. Their proceedings, however, as described by the first three Evangelists, and a declaration of some of their people as recorded by St John, would place the matter beyond all question, were there any preceding doubt. They evidently proceeded by the rule of evidence laid down in Numb. xxxv. 30, and Deut. xvii. 6. Afterwards, indeed, before Pilate, his prosecutors did not bring forward, at first, the crime of which they really believed him guilty; because it was not likely to influence a Roman Governor, who might have no respect for Jewish Laws. They accused him, at first, of sedition, for declaring himself Messiah, a King; but the governor perceived this

⁵ Psalm ii. 7, 12.

⁶ Joh. x. 33.

⁷ Joh. v. 18. Whitby, note on Luke xxii. 70.

to be an invidious charge. He knew that "for envy" they had accused him of this crime; and they were at length compelled to advert to the real grounds of their prosecution:—"We have a Law, and *by our Law* he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God." Happily for the cause of religion and truth, their Law has come down to our times; and it is hardly necessary to observe, that it is not a capital crime by any statute in the whole Mosaic Code to assume the title and character of the Messiah. The oral law, in the time of Christ, may be said to have had nearly the same relation to the Pentateuch, in the opinion of the Jews, that our common law bears to our statutes. They supposed both to have the same origin and equal authority; and some parts of the one were, unquestionably, useful as an explanation and supplement to the other. The traditionary maxims, which constituted the second law, were digested and published, by a learned and zealous Jew, about one hundred and eighty years after the trial of Christ¹; at a time when Christianity had diffused itself into every part of the vast extent of the Roman empire; when the Jews had practised every art to defame the new religion, and to apologize for their own conduct towards Christ and Christians. No precept or rule, therefore, in the oral law, however inconsiderable,

¹ The Misna was published by R. Juda about the year two hundred and twenty: but the Jews had employed themselves in collecting the traditions and customs, which form the body of this second law, from the time of their second destruction under Adrian. See Allix, "Judgment of the Jewish Church," C. xxiii. p. 395.

that might in any way tend to justify their conduct, would be left out of this collection. It is not, however, a capital crime, or any crime, by any rule found in the Misna, to assume the title and character of the Messiah; and, as the Sanhedrim condemned Jesus by their Law, and the Jewish people approved the sentence, because he professed to be the Son of God, they must have conceived him to have laid claim, in these words, to some other title and character, against which their Law was really directed. But, if the Pentateuch and Misna be examined with the utmost care, no statute or maxim will be found in either, which the Jews could mistake so far, as to conceive it capable of application to this case, unless they supposed Jesus, in declaring himself the Son of God, to claim Divinity: none of their laws appear to have any relation to this case, on any other supposition. If, indeed, our Lord was understood to have advanced this claim, having then generally lost all notion of a Trinity of Persons in the Divine Unity, and having never entertained the idea of the Son of God invested with human flesh, they would probably believe him guilty of a breach of the first commandment; and his case would be supposed to fall under the operation of some of the penal laws in the Pentateuch, enacted to enforce its observance.

To express the whole argument in a few words: Jesus Christ was condemned to death by the Jewish Law, for acknowledging himself the Son of God: the phrase, "Son of God," admits, and merely admits of

several different acceptations: the declaration must have been thought innocent, in the eye of the Law, in any of these significations, except one: in that, it was liable to be accounted a capital crime—it might be thought a breach of the first commandment: in that sense, therefore, it must have been understood by the Jews.

It will, perhaps, be objected that he, whom they accounted a false Messiah, would undoubtedly be tried and condemned, by the laws in the Pentateuch against false Prophets in general. Allowed. This is, indeed, very probable. Let these laws then be examined; not with the distracted attention and cursory reference of most of the commentators—but with the care, which a distinct and important subject of historical disquisition requires. These laws, as Maimonides has remarked, are directed against false prophets of two kinds: those who teach the worship of false gods; and those who falsely pretend to inspiration from the true and only God. Those of the latter description are to be convicted of imposture by the failure of their prophecies, and put to death¹. The others are to be considered as false prophets, and put to death for simply teaching the worship of false gods².

With the narratives of our Saviour's trial by the several Evangelists before us, is it possible to doubt by which of these laws he was condemned? The failure of his prophecies, we are well assured, made no part of the ground of his condemnation: it was

¹ Deut. xviii. 21, 22. ² Deut. xiii. 1—11.

for simply professing to be the "Son of God;" i. e. (as the Jews themselves, on another occasion, interpreted this expression) for making himself God³ that he suffered. Both the crimination and the sentence point to the law against false prophets, in Deut. xiii. "If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and give thee a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them: thou shalt not hearken to the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the LORD your God proveth you, to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul—and that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death," &c.

Thus, whether we affirm Jesus to have been condemned as a false Messiah, a false prophet, or a blasphemer—we are still compelled to conclude that he was proved, in the opinion of the Jews, to be a false Messiah, a false prophet, or a blasphemer, because he claimed Divinity.

To shew what confused and inaccurate notions Grotius entertained on this subject, it is enough to observe, that he supposed our Saviour condemned, for indirectly declaring himself the Messiah, by the law in the *eighteenth* chapter of Deuteronomy against false prophets. On the expression, "Son of God," he observes, "i. e. Messiam: ut notavimus suprà, Jo. i. 49, et x. 36. Si mori debet qui prophetam se dicit

³ John x. 33, 36.

⁴ John xix. 7.

cum non sit, mori multò magis debet, qui Messiam se dicit cum non sit, (per legem Deut. xviii. 20), cum Messias et propheta esse debeat et plusquam propheta.”

Some other commentators, however, have explained the reasoning of the Jews, in their judicial proceedings against Christ, with the utmost accuracy. “Si tu, Pilate, juxta leges Cæsareas et Romanas nullam in eo mortis causam invenis, nos juxta divinam legem invenimus maximam. In scripturis enim passim docemur non esse nisi unum Deum: atqui, hic finxit se esse naturalem Dei filium, et talis semper haberi voluit: ergo, nobis introducere tentavit secundum Deum: nam filius Dei naturalis necessario est Deus. Jam vero lex jubet pseudoprophetas et blasphemos omnes morte plecti (Levit. xxiv. 16, et Deut. xiii. 5), ergo hic morte plectendus¹.”

Another commentator has also expressed the reasoning of the Jews nearly in the same manner. “Secundum leges Romanas causam non invenis, at secundum nostram causa maxima est, blasphemia in Deum. Sibi dignitatem filii Dei arrogavit, sc. naturalis (nam adoptivos se etiam ipsi dicebant: ‘unum patrem habemus Deum’ inquit Joan. viii.) unde alibi, ‘tu, homo cum sis, facis teipsum Deum².’”

V. A modern objection against the reality of the Christian miracles may be viewed in connection with the law, which I have just cited. The rejection and crucifixion of Christ, it is intimated, prove

¹ Tirinus, Annot. in Joh. xix. 7.

² SA. in John xix. 7.

that the Jews discredited his miracles; for the united force of their prejudices "would have been irresistibly borne down by the natural influence of an undoubted miracle³." In answer to this, we have simply to point to the law in Deut. xiii. It is one of that system by which their opinions were partly formed, and their ecclesiastical government conducted in the time of Christ⁴: it is directed against the particular case of miracles wrought in support of false doctrines: and it is even probable, that the case of Jesus Christ was brought under the operation of this very law.

"Orobio the Jew, in his friendly conference with Limborch, has thus stated the topic, which we are at present considering.—It can scarcely be imagined that the whole people would exercise their malice and hatred against a man, who raised the dead, gave sight to the blind, healed the sick, and wrought numberless miracles⁵." Owing to some temporary oversight, to which any writer is liable, this learned and candid Jew has certainly intimated, that his ancestors could not have persecuted and crucified Jesus, had they credited his miracles; and this thoughtless assertion has been expanded into a regular argument, and urged in a tone of as high confidence, as if it were decisive of the fate of Christianity itself. But, whatever authority the objection may derive

³ "Jewish and Heathen Rejection of the Christian Miracles," by T. Edwards, p. 10.

⁴ Basnage, B. 5. C. ii.

⁵ "Jewish and Heathen Rejection of the Christian Miracles," p. 8.

from the name of Orobio, or whatever additional importance it may acquire in consequence of its adoption and improvement by any Christian of our own time, its original author will be driven from his ground by an armed host of his own tribes; each individual of which will bring into the field a higher name and more force than this champion, who has been most injudiciously drawn out to defy the armies of Israel. It must be a matter of common notoriety, that this objection is totally inconsistent with the usual reasoning of the Jews against Christianity. It is implied in the objection, that the contemporaries of Christ discredited his miracles, because he was rejected and crucified; whereas Jews of every age have contended, that miracles afford no proof of the divine mission of a prophet, who teaches false doctrines, such as they suppose Jesus to have taught: and consequently, according to their notions, he might have been persecuted and crucified by their ancestors, while the reality of his miracles was fully admitted.

He asserted, as they believe, his own Divinity: and his case, in their opinion, fell under the law against the false prophet, (in the thirteenth chapter of Deuteronomy) who should teach the worship of false gods. They even go farther than to assert our Lord's case to have been provided for by this general law: they believe it to have been framed against the individual case of Jesus Christ. He is particularly pointed out, they contend, in one of the clauses. "If thy brother, *the son of thy mother,*

entice thee secretly," &c. "This is Jesus," say they, "who denied his father, saying that he had a mother but not a father; that he was the Son of God, and God¹." Fagius remarks "Cæci Judæi, maximè impiissimus nebulo author Libri Nizahon de Christo unico ac vero salvatore nostro, hæc verba exponit, quasi Moses ipsum *proprie* hîc notârit, eo quod ipse se ex muliere tantum, non ex viro natum dixerit, atque filius tantum matris suæ, non etiam patris esse voluerit."

Maimonides may speak in the name of the generality of the Jews since the twelfth Century; and he maintains that the miracles of a prophet, (whose claim is set aside by certain rules, which are pointed against those, who recommend the worship of other gods) are no proof of the truth of his pretensions. His reason would make no inconsiderable figure in the metaphysics of Malebranche, Des Cartes, or Locke. "Because the testimony of the understanding, which proves the falsity of his professions, is of more weight than that of the eyes, which see his miracles²."

The case of Christ, though not expressly mentioned, is clearly enough alluded to; and the general scope of his reasoning is founded on the principle of the law in the thirteenth chapter of Deuteronomy; to which he refers, and observes that the cause, why God permits such miracles, is assigned in that chapter:—"Because the Lord your God trieth you."

¹ See Fagius on Chald. Paraph. Deut. xiii. in the Critici Sacri. See also his note on Deut. xviii. 15.

² Maimonidis Præfatio in Misnam, p. 3. Ed. Surenhusii.

Maimonides then, who affirms miracles to be no proof of the truth of a prophet's pretensions, will never admit the position of Orobio and his advocate; who contend, that the united force of the Jewish prejudices must have been irresistibly borne down by the natural influence of an undoubted miracle.

The sentiments of Maimonides respecting the force of the evidence of miracles in general, and the reality of those of Christ in particular, were those of the more ancient Jews at large. On this subject, they have entertained the same opinions from the time of Christ to the present day. They, at that time, held miracles insufficient to justify the claim of Divinity: they have maintained the same opinion in subsequent ages: and therefore could never imagine that the rejection and punishment of our Saviour, who, as they strenuously contend, advanced this claim, afforded any presumption against the belief of contemporaries in the reality of his miracles.

The Jewish author, who has unaccountably found an advocate in a learned Christian, when it might have been reasonably supposed that Jew, Gentile and Christian would have been unanimous in exploding this extravagance, is not only refuted by whole tribes of his own people—he has actually refuted himself. In one part of his writings (I quote them on the authority of Limborch¹) he affirms, in the fullest and most direct terms, that our Saviour

¹ “Jesum in se ipsum, ut verum Deum Israelis, fidem exegisse, Dei omnipotentiam sibi arrogasse, se Deo æqualem prædicasse, et quidem falsò.” Orobio apud Limborch. *Amica Collatio*, p. 252. Ed. Goudæ. 1688.

laid claim to Divinity; in another place he asserts, that "if a Prophet, or even the Messiah himself, the acknowledged Messiah, had proved his divine mission by miracles, but claimed Divinity, he ought to be stoned to death²." By this acknowledgment—one of the claims of Jesus constituted in itself a crime, for which no miracles could atone, and deserved a punishment, which they ought not to prevent; the writer therefore admits, in full and decisive answer to himself, that the rejection and punishment of that claim afford not the slightest presumption against the belief of the Jews in the Christian miracles. He, in fact, grants that the Jewish nation might have first received Jesus as the Messiah, on account of miracles; and afterwards have destroyed him for claiming Divinity. Orobio himself, if it be thought necessary, will seal Orobio's condemnation. But we are not reduced to rest on the authority of an adversary, in order to prove that the Jewish rejection of the claims of Christ affords no presumption of their disbelief of his miraculous power. On one side, they saw his miracles, which Jews of that age and of every age have thought might be effected by the agency of evil spirits, permitted by God to try the firmness

² "Quin imo Vir Doct. ad Quæst. 3. Num. 8. p. 109, 110, 111, contendit *Prophetam* (imo ipsum Messiam) *si seipsum Deum Israelis esse affirmasset* (quod hic Domino Jesu adscribit) *et plurimis confirmaret miraculis, jure esse lapidandum.*" P. 252. "Sed quò tandem hæc viri docti machina tendit? Ut evincat *Dominum Jesum Deum Israelis sub ideâ diversâ ab eâ quam Deus Israeli revelaverat, colendum proposuisse, ac perinde alienum docuisse Deum: Licet itaque plurimis doctrinam istam confirmaret miraculis, quod secundum legem Deut. xiii. jure lapidandus foret,*" &c. p. 295.

of their faith, and the constancy of their obedience to the Mosaic Law: on the other, they heard him assert his own Divinity. The union of the divine and human natures they conceived to be impossible; the claim of Divinity impious. The supposed impiety and impossibility of one of his claims, in their opinion, overturned the weaker evidence of undisputed miracles wrought in its support. They weighed what to them appeared opposite evidences; and the preponderance of that side, on which their prejudiced opinions had placed the greater weight, decided the conduct of the magistrates and the infidelity of the people.

Christians have had to oppose two very different classes of adversaries; who ought, on their own account, to have concerted some consistent plan of operation, before they commenced their attacks. While one party, with the Jews, thinks lightly of the miracles of the New Testament, and the other contends that their force must have been "*irresistible*," had they been credited—we might withdraw from the contest, and leave them to settle the dispute between themselves. "Enfin des ecrivains, qui regardent les miracles comme autant d'absurdités et qui en nient non seulement l'existence, mais la possibilité, ne nous paroissent pas fort capables de décider de leur pouvoir sur le cœur des hommes. Aussi ces grands opposants à la revelation sont-ils peu d'accord entr'eux sur ce sujet. Si quelques-uns se persuadent que les miracles auroient une force *irresistible*, d'autres en jugent tout differemment. 'Redresse les boiteux,' dit l'un d'entr'eux, 'fais parler les muets,

resuscite les morts, je n'en serai point ebranlé. Remarquez la belle harmonie qui regne entre ces Messieurs. 'On ne resisteroit point aux miracles,' dit l'un; 'je n'en serois point ebranlé,' dit l'autre; c'est ainsi que s'accordent ces sages¹."

VI. The question before us, it must be remembered, is this: Whether Jesus, under the external disadvantages of an humble birth and appearance, was condemned by the Jewish Sanhedrim for professing to be their Messiah; or, for claiming a higher nature than they attributed to the great personage, whom they expected under that title? Whether he was condemned for indirectly declaring himself the Christ, the son of David and King of Israel; or for asserting his Divinity? And, in the discussion of this question, it seems reasonable to judge of the motives of the Sanhedrim, by those of the Jewish people; to explain the conduct of one body of Jews by the conduct of others; and to form our opinions on a connected and comparative view of the whole. If the magistrate and the subject, the learned and the ignorant, the inhabitant of the city and of the country, at different times, and in various situations, appear to have been incensed against our Saviour for asserting his Divinity, without shewing equal displeasure, when they conceived him to speak of his divine mission only as Messiah; we are then furnished with a forcible reason, in addition to those already stated, for believing that this was, at least,

¹ Lettres de quelques Juifs, Ed. 2^{de}. à Paris, p. 147.

the principal, if not the only ground of his condemnation. And, it may be added that such a perfect uniformity, in the interpretation of his words, by several different bodies of men of his own time and country, who all spoke the same language, were conversant about the same objects, to whom his figures of speech and modes of instruction would be familiar—such uniformity in the interpretation of his words, by so many different bodies of contemporaries, affords a decisive proof, that his meaning was not misunderstood.

In order to judge whether the Sanhedrim would condemn Jesus, appearing as he did appear, for teaching the doctrine of his Divinity, or for simply declaring himself the Messiah—we may first appeal to the conduct of a body of Jews of Jerusalem, described in the fifth chapter of St John. It is there related that he 'spoke of his divine mission, as Messiah: "Ye sent unto John, and he bare witness unto the truth: ...but I have greater witness than that of John:...for the works that I do bear witness of me, that the Father hath *sent* me:"—and no mention is made of any disapprobation expressed on this occasion. But a short time before this, when he had appeared to the same people to call God his Father in a more strict and proper sense than was consistent with the notion of his simple humanity, the sacred historian has recorded that they sought to put him to death. "Therefore, the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his *proper* Father—Πατέρα

ἴδιον ἔλεγε τὸν Θεόν—making himself equal with God¹.”

Some inhabitants of Jerusalem, according to this account, sought to kill him, because he called God his Father in such a sense as to make himself equal with God: and he was afterwards condemned to death, by the magistrates of Jerusalem, because he made himself the “Son of God.” We may judge of the interpretation of the latter phrase by that of the former—one being equivalent to the other; and conclude, with considerable probability, that he was on both occasions understood to call God his Father in such a sense as to claim Divinity; that, on this account, they at one time sought to kill him, and afterwards, on the same account, and not because he called himself the Messiah, condemned him to the cross.

In order to explain the conduct of the Sanhedrim by that of the Jewish people, our second appeal may be to a body of Jews collected in one of the courts of the temple of Jerusalem². In the conference of Christ with the Jews on this occasion—after having openly spoken of his divine mission, and having alluded to his divine nature without being understood by his hearers³—he, at length,

¹ John v. 18.

² John viii.

³ In this conference with the Jews, he declares himself a teacher, “the light of the world;” and appeals to his miracles to confirm this and his other claims. He speaks of his Father, that sent him, bearing witness of him; and addresses the Jews in these words, “Ye neither know me, nor my Father: if ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also.” Here, it will perhaps be said, is a plain allusion to his divine origin; and yet no violence was offered to him by the Jews.

addresses them in these remarkable words. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am." This sentence seems to contain no allusion to the office of the Messiah: but, he directly claims in it eternity of existence, an attribute of God alone: and, that the Jewish interpretation was the same with ours, appears not by any obscure and ambiguous words let fall on the occasion, but by a speaking action too expressive to be misunderstood:—"Then took they up stones to cast at him." Our Saviour asserts his pre-existence, and certain Jews immediately attempt to destroy him. Consistently with this claim, he afterwards on his trial professes to be, not merely the Messiah, according to the Jewish notions of their Messiah, the son of David, but the Son of God: and the Jewish Sanhedrim, in perfect consistency with the preceding conduct of the people, unanimously pronounce him worthy of death.

To account for the conduct of the Sanhedrim by comparing it with that of the people, we may appeal, in the third place, to another body of Jews collected in the temple¹. "And Jesus walked in the temple, in Solomon's porch: then came the Jews round about him, and said unto him:... 'If

The Evangelist has observed it, as if it were a remarkable circumstance: "These words spake Jesus,...and no man laid hands on him;" viii. 20. and he soon after even adds, "As he spake these words, many believed on him." v. 30. But he has solved the difficulty, v. 27: "They understood not that he spake to them of the Father," i. e. of God being his Father. They believed him to speak of one, who was strictly and properly his father; but had no conception, on this occasion, that he intimated this Father to be God.

¹ John x. 23.

thou be the Messiah, tell us plainly.' Jesus answered them, *I told you*, and ye believed not: the works, that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me. But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep....My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all, and none is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one."

"Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him. Jesus answered them, Many good works have I showed you from my Father: for which of those works do ye stone me? The Jews answered him, saying, For a good work we stone thee not, but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God."

In this narrative, two circumstances claim our notice. When Jesus remarks that he has already declared himself the Messiah, the observation appears to have made no uncommon impression on his hearers. So far from being reckoned blasphemous, it seems to have been heard without exciting more emotion than a common remark; and it is not till he declares himself one with his Father, that they take up stones to stone him. Their words, in this case, are no less significant than their actions. They do not say, "We stone thee, because thou being a humble Galilean makest thyself the Messiah;" but "We stone thee for blasphemy, and because thou,

being a man, makest thyself God.” The motive of the Jews, on this occasion, is avowed in direct and explicit terms. They attempt to stone him, because, in asserting his own Divinity, he was guilty of blasphemy; and in their observations, and his answer, we distinctly see the two claims, the combination of which they conceived to form his guilt. The first and principal, according to our Saviour’s account, was, that he called himself the Son of God: “Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified and sent into the world, ‘Thou blasphemest;’ because I said, I am the Son of God?” The second, and that which fixed the meaning of the other, was, that he professed to be one with God, whom he had called his Father. Both were combined in the affirmation, “I and my Father are one.” The people, on this occasion, attempt to stone him for blasphemy; and he was afterwards condemned by the Sanhedrim for the same crime. The people attempt to stone him, because, he, as they alleged, being a man, made himself God, by calling himself the Son of God, and professing to be one with his Father: and the Sanhedrim also condemned him to death, because he declared himself the Son of God. This narrative of the proceedings of the people contains a just exposition of the motives, which afterwards influenced their magistrates, and forms a valuable comment on the history of our Saviour’s trial.

The subsequent conduct of this same body of people is also not unworthy of attention. Our Saviour reproves them for considering him as a blas-

phemer, in declaring himself the Son of God; when in their own writings princes and rulers are sometimes, on account of their office, called Gods: and, applying the argument *a fortiori*, he intimates that the appellation would be given with a more strict propriety to him, who was *sanctified and sent* by the Father. So far in this expostulation, his language was doubtful. When he intimated, that the appellation would be applied with more propriety to him than to others, he might be supposed either to allude to his divine nature, or to assert only his divine mission: and so far he was suffered by the Jews to proceed without interruption. But, when he adds, "If I do not the works of *my Father*, believe me not: but, if I do, then though ye believe not me, yet believe the works, that ye may know and believe that *the Father is in me, and I in him.*" The Evangelist then relates, that "therefore they sought again to take him." The strain of this expostulation appeared to them the same with that, from which they had just concluded, that he being a man made himself God; and though he knew, that this was their interpretation, he neither on this, nor any other similar occasion, complained of any mistake.

In order to judge whether the Sanhedrim would probably condemn Jesus to death for declaring himself the Messiah, or for asserting his Divinity, we may make our fourth appeal to the conduct and language of a body of Jews in Galilee, described in the sixth chapter of St John. Five thousand men, who had witnessed his miracles, actually acknow-

ledged him as "that prophet that should come into the world," and were preparing to invest him with the kingly office; consistently with their notions of a Messiah. The next day, the same persons murmured disapprobation, when he intimated in metaphorical language that he was of more than human nature. "The Jews then murmured at him, because he said, I am the bread which came down from heaven." That they understood him on this occasion to allude to his Divinity and pre-existence, appears further from their own observation: "Is not this Jesus the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then that he saith, I came down from heaven?" i. e. We know his father and mother: we know that he was born of human parents: how then can he be of heavenly origin, as he affirms?

If this case be viewed in connection with the history of our Saviour's trial, we may ask, whether it is probable that he would be condemned to death by Jews for advancing that claim, which five thousand Jews had admitted; or that, at which they had expressed their displeasure by murmurs? After he had been judged guilty by the Sanhedrim for professing to be the Son of God, had the question been proposed to these five thousand people—had they been asked, what they conceived were the grounds of his condemnation—would they have declared it their opinion, that Jesus was condemned for professing to be that prophet, who should come into the world, or for the higher, and, as they thought, the more

extravagant claim of Divinity? Their language and conduct have obviated the question: they have virtually given their suffrages; and their opinion must have great weight in deciding ours.

It is on one occasion related by St John¹, that when Christ was speaking of his Father, the people, who heard him, understood not that he spoke of God; and it may be reasonably supposed, that when he indirectly or obscurely advanced the claim of Divinity, his meaning would be sooner discovered by men of learning than by the common people. Let the conduct of the Sanhedrim, then, be compared with that of a body of scribes and pharisees assembled from every town of Galilee and Judæa and Jerusalem itself². Before this assembly of men of education, as well as a great multitude of the common people, he assumed and exercised the power of forgiving sins. Then, certain of the scribes said within themselves, "Who is this that speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God only?" When he asserted the power of forgiving sins, on this occasion, it was at least suspected, by some of the scribes, that his words amounted to blasphemy—the crime for which he was afterwards condemned by the great national tribunal; which was probably for the most part composed of priests and scribes. The power of forgiving sins, far from being allowed to their expected Messiah, was considered by the scribes as appropriated to God alone: and he was afterwards condemned by the Sanhedrim for claiming a higher

¹ Chap. viii. 27.

² Luke v. 17.

nature than they admitted in the Messiah, in declaring himself the Son of God¹.

A very distinguished philosopher of the present age has made the following observation on the result of his own inquiries on this subject:—"I have shown that, by the confession of all the Christian Fathers, neither Christ himself, nor any of his Apostles before John, taught this pre-existence or Divinity with clearness, and that the chief reason which they assigned for it was, that the prejudices of the Jews, in favour of their Messiah being a mere man, were so strong, that their minds *would have revolted* at it²." A slight correction of the language of this remark will introduce a considerable, but a necessary alteration of the sentiments conveyed in it. Christ inculcated not the doctrines of his Divinity and pre-existence with clearness, on all occasions, on

¹ "They were offended at him, because in his discourses to them he sometimes gave them hints, that he was a much greater person than they imagined, upon which they called him a blasphemer, who made himself God, and equal with God; that is, who assumed to himself divine honours and more respect than was due to a prophet; for the Jews had no notion that their Messiah should be any thing more than mere man.

The Jews, as it appears from Justin's Dialogue with Trypho, objected to the Christians, that they worshipped more gods than one, and ascribed divine perfections to Christ. To this Justin (See Index to Thirlby's Edit. *Christus*) and other Christians answered, that frequent mention is made in the Old Testament of a person who is called God and is God, and yet is distinguished from the God and Father of all. Θεός καλεῖται καὶ Θεός ἐστι καὶ ἔσται. Justin, p. 261. Trypho says to Justin, It is written, "I am the Lord—my glory I will not give to another." This objection Justin answers, by observing that God speaks in opposition to false Gods and Idols, and not to his Word and his Son." Jortin's first Discourse on the Christian Religion, p. 17. Edit. 1768.

² Priestley's Letters to Candidates for Orders, p. 82.

account of the prejudices of the Jews, in favour of their Messiah being a mere man: this, and no more than this, has been granted by the Christian Fathers. He so frequently, however, and so plainly spoke of his Divinity and pre-existence, that their minds *did revolt* at it: on this account, they consulted how to put him to death. On the same account, they at different times took up stones to stone him. For this reason, the magistrates judged him guilty of blasphemy, and at last prevailed on the Roman governor to crucify him.

“If we look into the Gospel history,” observes this writer, “we shall find that all our Saviour himself taught or insinuated, were his divine mission in general, or his being the Messiah in particular; with the doctrine of the resurrection, and that of himself coming again to raise the dead and judge the world. These doctrines, accompanied with moral instructions, and reproofs of the Pharisees for corrupting the law of God, made up the whole of his preaching. *He never told his disciples that he had pre-existed*, or that he had any thing to do, before he came into the world; much less that he had made the world, and governed it: and there is abundant evidence that *this was admitted by the Christian Fathers*³.” In seeming contradiction, however, to a part of this remark, he observes in the next page, “The Fathers say, that whenever our Saviour said any thing that might lead his disciples to think that he was of a nature superior to that of man.

³ “History of early Opinions,” B. III. c. 3.

they were offended; and that he conciliated their esteem, whenever he represented himself as a mere man, such as they expected a prophet and the Messiah to be." With the same inconsistency, he has afterwards cited and alluded to several passages in the Fathers, in which they assert that Christ taught his own Divinity; though he informed not his disciples that he was the Creator of the world. Of these passages it will be sufficient to select the two following.

"Christ did not reveal his Divinity immediately, but was first thought to be a prophet, and the Christ, simply a man: and it afterwards appeared by his works *and sayings*, διὰ τῶν ἔργων καὶ τῶν ῥημάτων, what he really was¹."

"At Athens, Paul calls him (Jesus) simply a man, and nothing farther, and for a good reason: for *if they often attempted to stone Christ himself, when he spake of his equality with the Father, and called him, on that account, a blasphemer*, they would hardly have received this doctrine from fishermen²," &c.

On opening the New Testament, two difficulties at first occurred to the Fathers, as well as to the readers of the present day.—1. Why Jesus Christ, intending to deliver such doctrines as those of his own Divinity and pre-existence, should not openly teach them at first to his disciples and others on all convenient occasions. This difficulty they soon found

¹ Chrysostom ap. Priestley, Hist. of early Opinions, B. III. c. 3. p. 74.

² Ibid. p. 114.

to be imaginary. Having an opportunity of personal intercourse with Jews only a few ages after the time of Christ—and, probably, having access to Jewish writings of our Saviour's age, which are now lost—they must have been able to collect the opinions of that people, on the subject of their Messiah, with the utmost certainty. The Jews, they found, expected a mere man in the person of their Messiah; and, it was necessary for our Saviour gradually and cautiously to oppose this prejudice³, that he might not be destroyed as a blasphemer, before the purpose of his mission was accomplished. It would obviously be necessary for the disciples also to address the Jews with the same sort of caution, and for the same reason: the Fathers⁴ have declared that they did so: but how it should follow from this, that the Divinity of Christ was neither taught by himself nor his disciples, it is not easy to discover. 2. On looking into the New Testament, a difficulty occurs to account for the seeming inconsistencies in the conduct of the Jewish people towards our Saviour. At first,

³ An instance of the caution, with which he opposed the prevailing opinion on this subject, is recorded, Matth. xxii. 42. "What think ye of the Messiah? Whose son is he? They say unto him, The son of David. He saith unto them; How then doth David in spirit call him Lord?...If David call him Lord, how is he his son?"

⁴ See History of early Opinions, Vol. III. p. 50—123. Dr Priestley, B. III. c. 3, clearly proves that, according to the opinion of the Fathers, Christ taught his own Divinity, though with some caution. Yet, the running title of that Chapter is, "Christ *did not* teach his own Divinity!" Because the Fathers affirmed the doctrine of Christ's Divinity to have been taught with caution, Dr Priestley concludes that it was not taught at all; though they have assigned a reason for that caution, which he must allow to be sufficient.

indeed, we are astonished at a succession of apparent contradictions. At one time, we see five thousand men acknowledging him as the Messiah, and preparing to make him King: the day following, the same persons murmur at the fancied extravagance of his claims¹. On one occasion "many believed on him;" and immediately after, they took up stones to cast at him². Before his trial, he is hailed as the Messiah, with Hosannas, through the streets of Jerusalem; and soon after, the people cry out, "By our law he ought to die." On a further inspection of the Evangelical history, the whole difficulty vanishes. They believe on him, they seek to proclaim him King, they hail him, with Hosannas, as the Messiah only: they murmur when he alludes to his divine origin; they take up stones to stone him, when he declares that he existed before Abraham, and when he makes himself equal with God; and they exclaim, "We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God."

According to Dr Priestley's acknowledgement, the Fathers accounted for the apparent inconsistency of the disciples, in the same manner.

"The Fathers say, that whenever our Saviour said any thing that might lead his disciples to think that he was of a nature superior to that of man, they were offended; and that he conciliated their esteem, whenever he represented himself as a mere man."

¹ John vi. 15, 44.

² John viii. 30, 59.

CHAPTER III.

OTHER REASONS, WHICH HAVE BEEN ASSIGNED FOR THE JEWISH REJECTION AND CONDEMNATION OF CHRIST, EXAMINED.

1. The prejudices against the humble birth of Christ, and his want of external splendour, not to be assigned as the principal causes of his persecution by the Jews, unless it can be discovered from the New Testament that they produced this effect. 2. Effect of the prejudice against his birth. 3. Effect of the prejudice against his want of temporal power and splendour. 4. The effect of these prejudices in a considerable degree destroyed by the influence of his miracles. The real grounds of his persecution by the Jews, how to be determined.

I. WHETHER the humility of our Saviour's birth and appearance will be sufficient to account for his rejection and condemnation by the Jews, after they had witnessed his miracles, is, I think, decided in the preceding chapters. Might not, however, the case stand thus? Jesus announced himself as Messiah: the Jewish nation at large convinced themselves of his imposture, from the circumstances of his humble birth and external appearance: and the magistrates, irritated against him on several accounts, at length condemned him to death for indirectly preferring this claim on his trial. In such a representation as this, there is certainly, previous to inquiry, nothing incredible; still, it is necessary to examine the Gospel history, to see whether it be just, or not. He was the object of Jewish censure on many accounts: this cannot be denied. Sometimes he was reprehended, because he sat down to eat with publicans and sin-

ners; sometimes they murmured at him for assuming the power of forgiving sins; and sometimes they consulted how they might put him to death, because he had broken the sabbath. In the opinion of some, he could not be a prophet, because he came from Galilee; and others maintained, that he could not be the Messiah, because all men knew whence he came. Their several prejudiced opinions, which were alarmed and assaulted by his conduct and doctrines, have been enumerated by Christian writers¹: but whenever men are said to be led to any course of action by the joint operation of many reasons, there is commonly some one leading motive paramount to the rest, which gives efficacy to the combination—to which the others are only subsidiary—and without which, they would have little effect. In assigning the principal motive of the conduct of the Jews towards our Saviour, both ancient and modern writers have advanced the most opposite opinions. Some of these authorities would, undoubtedly, demand great attention, if they were not opposed by others of equal weight; or if it appeared that their opinions had been the result of careful and accurate investigation.

The reason, which principally induced the Jews to persecute and destroy Jesus Christ, must be determined by the common rules for deciding any historical question. It probably was expected, by a part of the nation, that the birth of their Messiah

¹ Jortin, first "Discourse concerning the Truth of the Christian Religion."

would be, in some degree, correspondent to the splendour of his character. The birth of Jesus was mean; but we must not hastily conclude that this was his great offence, unless, on examining the Gospel history, we can distinctly trace out the operation of this cause, and see that it essentially and pre-eminently contributed to produce this effect. It certainly was expected, by the nation at large, that the Messiah would manifest himself in the full glory of a great king and conqueror. Jesus, without any of the expected brilliancy and magnificence, appeared in the meek dignity of an humble teacher: and the disappointment of the Jews, in such a material article of their hopes, would probably so far counteract the effect of his miracles, as to induce many of them to suspend their assent to his claims; to prevent them from immediately acknowledging him, and crowning him king; or, even to create a strong presumption against the reality of his divine commission: but, it must not thence be concluded, that the decided national rejection of his claims, their consultations how to put him to death, the execution of this bloody purpose, and their continuance in incredulity after the great miracle of his resurrection, are to be attributed to this cause. This supposition cannot be admitted, unless, on an examination of the Gospel history, the prejudice against his humble appearance should be found to have actually effected this extensive and complicated operation. The contrast, between the humility of Christ and the exalted expectations of the Jews, suggests itself to every one, on

first opening the New Testament, as likely to be one of the causes, perhaps the principal cause, of the Jewish persecutions: but, he will not be satisfied with probable conjecture, when, by a continuation of his inquiry, he can easily discover what was the matter of fact.

II. On looking over the Gospels with a particular view to this question, it is found that *the inhabitants of Nazareth*¹ were offended at the meanness of our Saviour's birth and family; and this prejudice is the cause assigned, by the first two Evangelists, for their incredulity. This, as far as I can discover, is the only historical evidence, which has ever been adduced, to prove that the *humility of his birth* was the great stumblingblock to the Jews. But this, it ought to be observed, was an extreme, and extraordinary case: it was noticed as such by Jesus himself: he marvelled because of their unbelief, and intimated that he was not without honour, except in this petty city.

It is *once* mentioned in the Gospel that some of the inhabitants of Jerusalem drew conclusions unfavourable to his claims, because he came from Galilee²; and it is once mentioned that some of them of Jerusalem said, "We know this man, whence he is: but when the Messiah cometh, no man shall know whence he is³." Immediately after this, when he declared his divine mission only, they sought to take him; but, "no man laid hands on him." These

¹ Luke iv. 16, 24.

² John vii. 41.

³ John vii. 27.

are, I think, the only instances on record in the New Testament, where prejudices of any sort respecting our Saviour's birth are pointed out as an efficient cause of the incredulity of any part of the Jewish people: and these could neither have been extensive nor violent; for, in the last case it is mentioned, that many of the people believed on him, and said, "When Christ cometh, will he do more miracles than this man hath done?" Many of the people said, "Of a truth, this is that prophet;" others said, "This is the Messiah;" and, the officers of the high priests and pharisees, who were sent to apprehend him, returned without having executed their office, and reported to their employers—"Never man spake like this man."

III. The prejudice, against his appearance in the character of a teacher, instead of a king and conqueror, is still less sufficient to account for his persecution by the Jews. Sometimes they murmured at him; sometimes they consulted by what means they might put him to death; and sometimes they took up stones to destroy him. Without a separate examination of each of these cases—in which their displeasure was shown, in a greater or less degree—it is enough to observe, that the cause of their indignation, on all these occasions, is either expressly mentioned by the Evangelists, or may be clearly inferred from circumstances incidentally related in their narratives: and no instance can be produced, in which our Saviour's claim to the character of the

Messiah, combined with the Jewish prejudice against his humble appearance only, drew down their persecution upon him. On that single occasion, when they sought to take him, after he had affirmed that he was *sent* by God, their disbelief of his claim is not ascribed to their prejudice against his want of external splendour and temporal power, but to the notoriety of his parentage and country:—"When the Messiah cometh, no man shall know whence he is." A few days afterwards, when some declared him the Messiah, it was objected, not that he appeared as an humble teacher, instead of a king and conqueror; but that he was not born in Bethlehem¹; and could not, on that account, be really invested with the character which he affected.

IV. Ecclesiastical writers have enumerated most of the prejudiced opinions of Jews and Gentiles, which caught alarm at the person and doctrines of Christ: in this they have acted like rational inquirers. They have not indeed taken for granted that the reasoning of either Jews or Gentiles would "stand the test of a rigorous examination:" but they have endeavoured to discover the moral causes, which led them into error; and if their labours have been in some respects defective, they have, at least, been judiciously, and not unsuccessfully directed. They have enumerated prejudices *sufficient to account for* the conduct of the Jewish nation: but they have not attempted to show how far each of them actually

¹ John vii. 42.

operated; *which* was the leading and most efficient motive with the Jews, and *which* were only subsidiary and subordinate: whether some of their most inveterate opinions were not, in a considerable degree, subdued by the force of our Saviour's miracles; and whether some of them continued not, on all occasions, to act with unabated influence. It has been sometimes asserted that "the united force of all their prejudices must have been irresistibly borne down by the natural influence of an undoubted miracle." A slight attention to the opinions of the ancient Jews convinces us of the weakness of this position; but it deserves to be considered whether some very powerful prejudices were not actually borne down by the influence of Christ's miracles among a considerable part of the Jewish people. The Messiah was expected to shine forth in the power and splendour of a conquering monarch:—A poor Galilæan appeared teaching the mysteries of a spiritual kingdom in a future life: his miracles induced five thousand men to acknowledge him as the Messiah: and it was not till he had alluded to his *divine origin*, that they murmured. Notwithstanding the force of the same delusive expectations, on another occasion, he was hailed with Hosannas as the Messiah, by the people, through the streets of Jerusalem; and it was not till after he had professed himself the Son of God, that they clamoured for his crucifixion. Immediately before his trial, such multitudes were disposed to receive him as a prophet,

and the Messiah¹, that the magistrates judged it expedient to apprehend him apart from the people; and a great reward was given to one of his followers for the sole purpose of pointing out, how he might be seized when retired from the city. The magistrates "feared the people." On this account, probably, the trial was conducted in the middle of the night; and it was probably to overawe their own people, that they anxiously strove to make his punishment appear the act of the Roman governor, instead of their own². Allow the prejudiced opinion of the Jewish people, in favour of a brilliant and conquering monarch in the person of their Messiah, to have been very great—as it undoubtedly was—the influence of his miracles, then, was great, in subduing this prejudice. It is no where to be found in the New Testament, as an active cause of incredulity, much less of persecution. It appears to have been so far counteracted by the effect of his miracles, that, when another of their prejudices was not awakened, the Jewish people were strongly disposed to acknowledge him as the Messiah. What then was the great cause of their incredulity and cruelty? Let this be determined, like any other historical question, by an impartial examination of original and authentic documents: without a bias to any theolo-

¹ See Matthew xxi. 46.

² "Pilate said unto them, Take ye him, and judge him according to your law. The Jews therefore said unto him, It is not lawful for us to put any man to death." John xviii. 31. "When the chief priests and officers saw him, they cried out, saying, Crucify him, crucify him." John xix. 6.—Crucifixion was a Roman punishment.

gical system, or prejudice against it. Let the testimony of the Evangelists be collected by the same rules of common sense, as those by which we discover the sense of profane historians on a subject of mere history. Examine the Gospels in this manner; and it is found, that nearly all the attempts and consultations against our Saviour's life were occasioned by the claim of Divinity, which the Jews believed him to have advanced³. Forming our opinion of the *principal motive* of the Sanhedrim, by the *general conduct* of the Jewish people, it appears highly probable, that he would be condemned to death for asserting his Divinity; and, on attending to the history of his trial, it is found, as might be previously expected, that he was condemned for declaring himself the Son of God.

³ See the preceding Chapter.

CHAPTER IV.

WHETHER THE TERM "SON OF GOD" WAS ONE OF THE APPROPRIATE TITLES OF THE MESSIAH, WITH THE JEWISH NATION, IN THE TIME OF CHRIST.

I. Foundation of the opinion that Jesus was condemned for simply declaring himself the Messiah. Three combinations of opinions relating to this subject noticed. Proposal of the Question. 2. Theory of Allix. 3. Evidence from the New Testament to prove that the Jewish Messiah was called the Son of God. Examination of this evidence. What is proved by it. 4. Opposite evidence from the New Testament. Testimony of Origen. Conclusion. 5. Application of this conclusion to the History of Jesus Christ's trial.

I. WHEN our Saviour, on his trial, applied to himself the title of the "Son of God," he intended, as some have imagined, only to acknowledge himself as a human Messiah. The circumstances, of his humble birth and want of temporal power, convinced the Jewish Sanhedrim of his imposture; and, on this account, they condemned him to death.—In support of this opinion it is sometimes asserted, that the expected Messiah of the Jews was called "the Son of God" in the time of Christ; that custom had generally appropriated this appellation, as well as that of "the son of David," to the designation of his character and office: this, when not formally declared, is the silent supposition, the covered foundation, on which the whole superstructure is supported. If the Sanhedrim condemned Jesus for professing to be the human Messiah, whom they expected, when

he acknowledged himself the Son of God—it must have been, because custom, which always determines the signification of language, had connected this meaning and this term together. Having shown the fabric itself to be without solidity, it is not indeed necessary, for my purpose, but it will not be altogether useless, to inquire into the soundness of the foundation.

Three different combinations of opinions on this subject may just be mentioned.

1. According to one class of writers, the terms Christ or Messiah, and Son of God, were commonly used by the Jews of our Saviour's age in the same sense; who also, in the opinion of these writers, expected a divine being as their Messiah. If both these opinions be just—when Jesus declared himself the Christ without exception or limitation, he, at the same time, claimed Divinity; and the dispute between Trinitarians and Unitarians is at an end at once.

2. Unitarian Christians set out with the first of these opinions; but contend that the Jews expected a human Messiah; and that, when Jesus declared himself the Son of God, he laid claim to no higher nature than was admitted in the Jewish Messiah.

2. A third, and most numerous class, supposes also the terms Messiah or Christ, and Son of God, to have been commonly used by the Jews to denote the same idea. The writers of this class likewise maintain, that the Jewish Messiah was expected to be a mere man; but insist, at the same time, that Jesus declared himself the Son of God in a higher

sense than was consistent with the notions of the Jews; and that, unless they had conceived him to have claimed Divinity by the application of this title to himself, and by his other declarations, they could not have condemned him as a blasphemer.

The opinions of this class of writers are not often so clearly and distinctly expressed as in the following note of Cocceius. “Re verâ constat eum habitum fuisse blasphemum, quod divina videretur de se dicere, Johan. v. 18. et. x. 33. ubi clarè explicatur quod ea causa reputandi eum blasphemum fuerit, quod ‘Deum dixerit patrem *proprium*, se æqualem Deo faciens.’ Quare et hoc loco (sc. Joh. xix. 7.) verbum hoc ‘se ipsum filium Dei fecit’ non ad hunc modum intelligendum est, quo et Messiam vulgò dicebant filium Dei; sed secundum illum modum *ισότητος* cum Deo. Et ita accepit Pilatus, ut ex interrogatione ejus apparet; quum quærit, ‘Unde tu es?’” Cocceius in Joh. xix. 7.

If we agree, with all these three descriptions of writers, that the terms Messiah and Son of God were commonly used as marks of the same idea by the Jews of our Saviour’s age, we are still forced to conclude, with the last, that Jesus offended many of the people, and was condemned by the magistrates, for asserting his Divinity; for professing to be the Son of God, in a higher sense than they thought applicable to the Messiah. This has been proved at large in the preceding Chapters; and here the matter might rest. But it will not be uninteresting to examine whether the appropriation of this phrase

to the Messiah had really any place in the language of the Jews of our Saviour's age. They might, indeed, have found the Divinity of the Messiah clearly taught in the Old Testament; and they might have learnt from the same source that he would also be *called* the Son of God; but our question is, whether their expected Messiah *was actually called* the Son of God among the great body of the Jewish people of that age? This is not, it must be remembered, a question whether they thought the second psalm applied to their Messiah: they might admit, that God is represented in that psalm calling the Messiah his Son; (as he in other places calls the whole people of Israel his son, *Exod. iv. 22. Hos. xi. 1.*); and yet the term "Son of God" might not be among the titles, by which their expected deliverer was then commonly described. The Messiah was called, in their ancient prophecies, "Wonderful," "Counsellor," "The mighty God," "the everlasting Father," "the Prince of Peace." Yet none of these appear to have been commonly used as his appropriate titles in the time of Jesus Christ.

II. One class of evidence on this subject I propose to dismiss without much examination. Some divines, of great reputation in the last and preceding century, by comparing certain passages in Philo with others in the Targums and Rabbinical writers, were enabled to produce many plausible reasons for supposing, in direct opposition to the united testimony of Jewish and Christian antiquity, that the

Jews of our Saviour's age expected a divine being as their Messiah. By a few of these same reasons, and only by a few, it was attempted to prove that this divine personage was also then *called* the Son of God. Rittangelius and Snelneccer were among the first, if they were not the very first, authors of this visionary scheme; which has since received much celebrity from the ingenious pen of Allix. Though it has not been without advocates of real and high respectability in the present age, the great position in it respecting the national opinion of the Jews will probably be thought untenable; but the part of it relating to the *language*, rather than the opinion of the Jews, which their Unitarian opponents will be found to be most interested in defending, stands on still weaker grounds. I will not insist on the incompetency of the Rabbinical writers and some of the Paraphrasts; because if it be proved, from their works and those of Philo¹, that their expected Messiah *was called* by the Jews the Son of God, in the time of our Saviour, it is only because his Divinity was acknowledged in that age. The only arguments, in favour of the first of these opinions, rest on the supposed truth of the second, as a necessary medium of proof².

If then this class of evidence be admitted to prove the phrase "Son of God" to have been one of

¹ Though the term, Son of God, is found in Philo, both in a more literal and a more allegorical sense, it is no where applied to the Jewish Messiah.

² See the Chapters in Allix, on this part of his subject.

the common titles of the Jewish Messiah, eighteen hundred years since, the Divinity of their Messiah must incontestably have been one of their tenets at the same time; and when Jesus declared himself Christ, he at once asserted his own Divinity.

III. The only *appearance* of legitimate evidence, in favour of the opinion which I am considering, is to be collected from the New Testament; and is very fully stated by Limborch. “Ut prescius respondeam, dico 2. Quando exigitur fides in Jesum Christum, nusquam in toto Novo Testamento exigi, ut credamus Jesum esse ipsum Deum, sed Jesum esse Christum seu Messiam olim promissum, *vel quod idem est, esse Filium Dei, quoniam appellationes Christi, et Filii Dei, inter se permutantur.* Cui denominationi occasionem dedisse videntur verba Davidis, Psal. ii. 7. ‘Filius meus es tu, ego hodie genui te:’ et Dei, 2 Sam. vii. 14. ‘Ero illi in Patrem, et ille erit mihi in Filium.’ Quæ sensu sublimiore Messiae applicata sunt. Inde factum ut denominatio illa *Christi* seu *Messiae* et *Filii Dei* inter Judæos et discipulos Christi pro eâdem habita fuerit: quod variis locis Novi Testamenti evidenter comprobari potest. Quando Philippus Nathanaeli dixit, ‘Invenimus quem scripsit Moses in Lege et Prophetis,’ &c. postea Nathanael, viso domino Jesu, inquit, ‘Tu es filius Dei, tu es rex Israel.’ Johan. i. 46. 50. Petrus omnium Apostolorum nomine respondens quæstioni Domini, interrogantis quem se esse dicerent, ait, ‘Tu es Christus Filius Dei vivi,’

Matt. xvi. 16. quæ verba Marcus recensens solummodo habet; ‘Tu es Christus,’ c. viii. 29. et Lucas, ‘Tu es Christus Dei,’ c. ix. 20. Sic Matt. xiv. 33. Discipuli dicunt Jesu, noctu ad ipsos super mari ambulanti, postquam in navem adscendisset—‘Verè Filius Dei es tu,’ et Act. viii. 37. eunuchus reginæ Candaces—‘Credo Jesum Christum esse Filium Dei.’ Et, *quod omnem dubitationem tollit*, Pontifex Dominum Jesum coram tribunali suo stantem adjurat per Deum vivum, ut dicat, ‘si sit Christus Filius Dei.’ Matt. xxvi. 63. Quod clarius apud Lucam exprimitur, c. xxii; nam postquam v. 66. seniores et principes sacerdotum interrogaverant, ‘Si tu es Christus, dic nobis;’ eandem quæstionem repetentes, ver. 70. quærunt, ‘Tu ergo es Filius Dei?’ Manifesto indicio, *Messiam* seu *Christum*, et *Filium Dei* esse, idem plane significasse.”

“Et ne forte vir doctus excipiat, hanc esse meam peculiarem explicationem, operæ pretium est ostendere etiam præstantissimos et maxime eximios inter Christianos Theologos loca hæc in eandem mecum sententiam explicare. Non hic producam explicationes Episcopii, cum meis plane easdem, sed duorum maxime eximiorum, et cum quorum eruditione et ingenii acumine vix ulli inter eruditos comparari merentur, Desiderii Erasmi et Hugonis Grotii¹.”

Notwithstanding the subtilty with which this evidence is stated by a professed disputant—on attending to the several arguments, they will be found to fall short of the object, which they are brought

¹ Amic. Coll. p. 218.

to establish. They, in fact, prove only that Jesus had declared himself Messiah the Son of God, instead of Messiah the son of David, and that he had also been announced under this title by John the Baptist; but, from them no inference can be drawn relating to the only point in question, the popular use of the phrase "Son of God" as a title of the Jewish Messiah. As great stress, however, continues to be laid on these arguments by several men of learning, a separate examination of each may be necessary.

1. And first, with respect to the two questions of the Jewish Sanhedrim, to our Saviour, recorded in St Luke: to affirm that one of these is a mere repetition of the other, that they are the *same question* ("eandem quæstionem repetentes") in different words, is taking for granted all that the learned writer is attempting to prove. I have endeavoured to shew in the preceding Chapters, in opposition to this gratuitous supposition, that the two questions must have been essentially different; (as they are supposed to be by many others); and that Jesus was not condemned for simply professing to be the Christ, either in direct or indirect terms.

But, according to St Matthew and Mark, the high priest asked our Saviour, "Art thou the Messiah, the Son of God?" and the question, it is contended, proves that custom had set apart both these terms to denote the same idea. Not to mention that this, which, in the abridged accounts of Matthew and Mark, appears as one question, was in fact two;

as may be inferred from St Luke's narrative; it is sufficient to observe, that the questions of the Sanhedrim would be regulated by the accounts that they had received of the nature of our Saviour's claims, not by their own opinions on the subject of their Messiah: nor would their questions be confined to *language*, which custom had sanctioned; when their only object was to discover what terms Jesus had actually applied to himself, whether custom had justified their use, or not. They would ask him about *his* doctrines, not about their own; about language which he had applied to himself, not about language which they thought applicable to their Messiah: and the only inference from their questions is, that Jesus had previously professed to be the Christ the Son of God, instead of Christ the son of David, and that the high priest had received information of the circumstance; but, whether these titles had ever been combined, or used synonymously, in that age, except by Christ himself, by John the Baptist, who first announced his nature and office, and by their disciples and followers, by no means appears from these questions.

2. When Nathanael acknowledged Jesus as the Son of God and king of Israel, before he became a disciple, it is concluded, that these must have been the established titles of the Messiah among the Jews of that age. Two contending classes of Theologians have united in insisting strongly on this point. On examining the whole account, however, it is found that Nathanael uttered this declaration two days after

our Saviour had been announced as the Messiah and Son of God, at the baptism of John; he seems also to have been near the place, and to have had the means of being informed of the circumstances¹ attending the baptism, from one of John's disciples: and a knowledge of these circumstances, acquired in this manner, combined with the proof, which our Lord immediately gave, of a foresight more than human, probably induced him to exclaim—"Thou *art* the Son of God, thou *art* the king of Israel." Thou art really possessed of the divine nature, and invested with the royal office, which John has just proclaimed². The application of the first of these titles to the Messiah, by a disciple or follower of John or of Jesus, after the former had appeared to

¹ "Lo, a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," Matth. iii. 17.

"I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God." John i. 34.

² Dr Horsley and Dr Priestley have attempted to support two opposite opinions by the declaration of Nathanael. "So far as they believed in Jesus as the Messiah, in the same degree they understood and acknowledged his Divinity....It was in Nathanael's very first interview with our Lord, that he exclaimed, 'Rabbi, thou art the Son of God: thou art the king of Israel:' and this declaration is drawn from Nathanael by some particulars in our Lord's discourse, which he seems to have interpreted as indications of Omniscience." Letters to Dr Priestley, p. 107. [p. 239, ed. 1812.]

"With respect to Nathanael's calling Jesus *the Son of God*, this phrase was in the mouth of a Jew synonymous to the *Messiah*, or *son of David*: and it is fully explained by the subsequent expression of Nathanael himself, viz. *King of Israel*." Letters to the Archdeacon of St Alban's. Part II. p. 107. [p. 254. ed. 1815.] "Nathanael confessed Christ as a man, when he addressed himself to him by the title of *Son of God*, as appears by his adding, *the king of Israel*." Chrysostom. ap. Priestley, Hist. of early Opinions, Vol. III. p. 67.

It will be sufficient to refer *Dr Priestley* to the testimony of Origen on this subject, whose veracity he has very ably and successfully defended.

prepare the way for the new economy, affords not the slightest proof, that the title was acknowledged among the Jews at large.

To remove old prejudices, and to prepare the minds of some of his hearers for the reception of new and sublime truths, would be the great objects of the preaching of John. And, if the prejudices of the great body of the Jews were always alarmed, whenever our Saviour professed to be the Son of God, the aversion to his claims and doctrines might have been universal, had not some of them been previously informed by John, that the Messiah, whose kingdom was at hand, was to be in some very eminent and peculiar manner the Son of God, and not a mere descendant of David.

3. When "they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God;"—when Martha declared, "Lord, I believe that thou art the Messiah, the Son of God, which should come into the world;"—and when the Eunuch of Candace answered Philip, "I believe that Jesus Messiah is the Son of God¹;"—these persons must have known that Jesus had assumed these titles which they admitted; but, from this no inference can be drawn in favour of the general prevalence of this sort of language in the Jewish nation. Their answers amount only to this: "Jesus is really the being which he professes to be."

4. The accounts of Peter's answer in the first three Evangelists, at first sight, seem to prove some-

¹ Matthew xiv. 33. John xi. 27. and Acts viii. 37.

thing more. In St Matthew, Peter says "Thou art the Messiah, the Son of the living God²;" in St Mark, "Thou art the Christ;" in St Luke, "Thou art the Christ of God." When these answers, separated from their respective contexts, are compared together, it might seem that the terms, Messiah and Son of God, were used synonymously by the Apostles in the early part of Christ's ministry; and the probable inference would be, that they were so used by the Jews at large. This conclusion would be inevitable, were it true that the same subject matter is always to be found in all the Evangelists, set forth only in different language. If one Evangelist never omitted to relate what is mentioned by another, the words of Peter, as described by St Matthew, would unquestionably convey no further meaning than his answer, as it is found in St Mark. But, on comparing the three Gospels, it is found that several material circumstances, in the conferences of Christ with his disciples, are mentioned at length by St Matthew, which are either wholly or partially omitted in the others.

By what reasons the Evangelists were sometimes led to omit the recital of some of the words and actions of our Saviour and the Apostles, can now only be a matter of mere conjecture. In the present instance, the case might possibly be thus. During our Saviour's ministry, and before it, the terms, Messiah and Son of God, had not been generally used by the Jews in the same sense; but after he

² Matthew xvi. 16. Mark viii. 29. and Luke ix, 20.

had applied both these titles to himself, they would in a few years be used by Christians indifferently the one for the other; as they are at present. Luke and Mark, who wrote principally for the information of Greek and Roman Christians about A. D. 59 and 65, would think it superfluous to employ both terms, when custom had brought one to be implied in the other, when to be acknowledged as the Christ was to be acknowledged as the Son of God. But Matthew, who wrote his Gospel, for the use of Jewish Christians, only a very few years after our Saviour's crucifixion, might judge it necessary to impress on their minds a truth, of which they had but lately been informed, It was necessary to teach them, that their Messiah was not merely a descendant of David, but the Son of God¹.

None of these indirect testimonies (and no others, I believe, can be produced) tend to prove that the Jewish Messiah was commonly described under the appellation of the Son of God in our Saviour's age. The evidence against this opinion will perhaps be thought conclusive.

IV. 1. One circumstance, rather in favour of the opposite opinion, has been already noticed. Whenever Jesus openly declared, or indirectly intimated, that he was the Messiah only, without teaching any new doctrines respecting his nature and origin, his words gave no offence to the great body of his hearers. On one occasion, indeed, after a general

¹ Cave, *Historia Literaria*, p. 14, 15.

declaration of his divine mission, some of them entertained thoughts of apprehending him; but others at the same time believed him to be the Messiah; and not a single case is recorded, in which they attempted to destroy him for simply assuming that character. Some heard him advance this claim without emotion; by others he was eagerly desired to declare himself more openly; and by many he was actually acknowledged as the Messiah. But, when he professed to be the Son of God, or, by an equivalent phrase, called God his Father, they believed him to have incurred the guilt of blasphemy. Had they been accustomed to combine the terms Messiah or Christ, and Son of God, or to use them in the same sense, they would probably not have heard the first applied to our Saviour, sometimes with patience, and sometimes with approbation, and have burst forth into sudden and vehement expressions of rage, when he appropriated to himself the second.

Great stress, however, it must be acknowledged, cannot be laid on this argument. Their Messiah might be commonly described under the appellation, "Son of God;" and yet they might perceive that Jesus applied the title to himself in a higher sense than they thought applicable to their expected deliverer.

2. When our Lord asked the scribes and pharisees their opinion of the nature and origin of their Messiah; "What think ye of Messiah? Whose son is he?" had this great personage been at that time

² Matthew xxii. 42.

denominated *in any sense*, the Son of God, this question must have drawn from them a declaration to that effect; and they would not have been satisfied with answering, "He is the son of David." They would probably have replied, "He is a descendant of David, and is also the Son of God by adoption." He next asks them, "How then does David call him Lord?" they do not add, "The Messiah will be so highly favoured of heaven as to be named in a peculiar sense the Son of God;" but they are silent; as if they understood not the nature and force of his question. Their answer in one case, and silence in the other, militate strongly against the supposition of the Messiah being then commonly distinguished by this title.

3. When Peter said, "Thou art the Messiah, the Son of the living God¹," our Saviour replied, "Flesh and blood hath not revealed this to thee, but my Father which is in heaven." A divine revelation was necessary to convey this important truth, immediately or mediately, to the mind of Peter, it being contrary to the received opinions and above the comprehension of a Jew. Had the two terms been synonymous, in the public opinion; had Peter, in using these two terms, simply declared that Jesus was the Messiah; the remark of our Saviour would have been inapplicable: for, before that time, five thousand men had declared him to be that prophet, who should come into the world; and it was only his subsequent intimation

¹ Matthew xvi. 16.

of a divine nature and origin, which had caused them to murmur.

I have already observed, that in two of the Evangelists the latter part of Peter's declaration is omitted; and in omitting our Saviour's remark at the same time, they have pointed out, more plainly than by language, the two parts in St Matthew's narrative, between which the connection subsists. St Mark has only recorded a part of the answer of Peter, "Thou art the Christ;" St Luke, "the Christ of God;" they have not added the term "Son of God:" and, consistently with this omission, they have both left out our Saviour's observation, "Flesh and blood hath not revealed this to thee, but my Father which is in heaven."

4. The profession of the Eunuch² is so far from proving the two terms to have been commonly considered as synonymous, that it rather tends to invalidate the supposition, which it has been brought to support. From the very structure of the sentence, it seems as if an *additional and a higher conception* were implied in the idea annexed to the term Son of God; as if this (and not the Messiahship of Jesus) formed the great object of the speaker's faith.

He neither says, "I believe that Jesus is the Messiah;" nor, "I believe that Jesus is the Son of God;" nor, "I believe that Jesus is the Messiah the Son of God:" but, "I believe that Jesus Messiah is the Son of God."

² Acts viii. 37.

5. It appears to have been one of the objects of Origen's researches, to gain information on the opinions of the Jews respecting the nature and character of their expected Messiah. No individual had ever greater opportunities of gratifying his curiosity on this subject, by a continual residence among multitudes of Jews in Alexandria and Palestine; and no one probably ever gained more copious or more accurate information. The greatest scholar of the age, whose knowledge of *Jewish literature* in particular was unusually extensive, unquestionably knew whether the phrase "Son of God" had been applied to their Messiah in any of the Jewish writings near the time of our Saviour, less than two hundred years before his own age. He had endeavoured to gain information on this particular subject, by conversing with many well-informed persons among that people¹; and the result of his inquiries would, without any other evidence, be sufficient to decide on this question. Celsus, who lived little more than a century after the time of Christ's crucifixion, had introduced a fictitious Jew asserting, that his prophet had predicted the coming of a Son of God to judge the virtuous, and punish the wicked. Origen, in answer, directly accuses his antagonist of ignorance, in making his imaginary Jew speak out of character; and one part of the objectionable language is the phrase in question. A Jew, he affirms, would not acknowledge

¹ Ἐγὼ δὲ καὶ πολλοῖς Ἰουδαίοις καὶ σοφοῖς γε ἐπαγγελλομένοις εἶναι συμβαλὼν, οὐδενὸς ἀκήκοα ἐπαινοῦντος τὸ, λόγον εἶναι τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ. L. II. Cont. Cels. p. 79. Ed. Spenc.

that any prophet had predicted the coming of a Son of God: it was the expression, the Christ or Messiah of God, on which they insisted. "What they say is, that the *Christ of God* will come, and they frequently inquire of us immediately about a Son of God; as *if no such personage existed*, or had been predicted. We do not say this, that a Son of God is not predicted by the prophets; but that he has improperly put the expression in the mouth of a Jew in his prosopopœia, *who acknowledges no such thing*²."

Origen, instead of allowing the propriety of the expression, and only explaining its meaning, affirms it to be altogether unsuitable to the character of a Jew. Had the term really been appropriated *in any sense* to the Messiah among the Jews, either in the age of Celsus, or a hundred years earlier, Origen must have suppressed his objection; which was of no use whatever in forwarding the great design of his work, the defence of Christianity.

Upon the whole: with no direct testimony whatever on one side, and with the testimony of Origen, supported by a strong body of probable evidence deduced from the New Testament, on the other, it

² Ἰουδαῖος δὲ οὐκ ἂν ὁμολογήσαι ὅτι προφήτης τις εἶπεν ἦξει Θεοῦ υἱόν· ὃ γὰρ λέγουσιν ἔστιν, ὅτι ἦξει ὁ Χριστὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ, καὶ πολλάκις γε ζητοῦσι πρὸς ἡμᾶς εὐθέως περὶ υἱοῦ Θεοῦ· ὡς οὐδενὸς ὄντος τοιούτου, οὐδὲ προφητευθέντος· καὶ οὐ τοῦτό φαμεν, ὅτι οὐ προφητεύεται υἱὸς Θεοῦ· ἀλλ' ὅτι οὐχ' ἀρμοζόντως τῷ Ἰουδαϊκῷ προσώπῳ, μὴ ὁμολογοῦντι τὸ τοιοῦτο, περιέθηκε τὸ, "εἶπεν ἐμὸς προφήτης ἐν Ἱεροσολύμοις ποτὲ, ὅτι ἦξει Θεοῦ υἱός. L. 1.

seems necessary to conclude, that custom had not appropriated this title, to the Messiah of the Jews, near the time of Jesus Christ.

V. To connect this conclusion with the history of our Saviour's trial: Is it possible that he should be condemned by the Jewish Sanhedrim, for claiming the office of their Messiah, because he applied a term to himself, which, among them, had no further relation to the Messiah, than to any other being who was favoured and protected by God? Is it credible that they themselves in their questions should use an old term, which with them was not exclusively appropriated to any individual, in a new and a definite sense, on so serious an occasion as a trial for a capital offence, without any previous explanation or notice? It is hardly probable that they should convict him of this offence by his own confession, unless he had *directly* declared himself the Messiah. The term "son of David" appears to have really been an appropriate title of their expected deliverer; but, had our Lord even declared himself "the son of David," the declaration would probably not have been admitted as a proof that he claimed the office of the Messiah: much less could they have so considered the assumption of a title, by which their Messiah was not distinguished from themselves.

They expected a Messiah, the son of David: they knew that Jesus had assumed his name and office, and that he had moreover claimed a higher nature

than they admitted in the great king and prophet, whom they expected under that title: they could not have totally misunderstood the purport of his former questions to the scribes—when he had raised difficulties, which they had not removed, against the received opinion of the Messiah being a mere descendant of David. They had probably received intelligence, that he had spoken of his own omnipotence and eternity, in terms too plain to admit of much doubt; that he had claimed the privilege of forgiving sins, and of judging the world at the general resurrection; powers which they admitted not their expected Messiah to possess, and which they held impious in any individual to claim. Consistently with, what they thought, these new and too exalted pretensions, they would also probably have been informed that he had appropriated to himself a *new* language (though he had, in reality, only *revived* the language of the Old Testament) at once significative of his high nature and power: that he had not only called himself the Christ, the son of David, but that he had also called himself the Son of God: that he had called God his Father in a more strict and proper sense, than was consistent with the notion of simple humanity: that great numbers of his countrymen, who had heard him speak of his divine mission, as Messiah, without emotion, or who had ardently expected him to declare himself openly, and who had even acknowledged him in that character, were immediately alarmed, and enraged at language, which indicated

his divine nature. The circumstances of his baptism might have been obscurely related to them, when he was first announced as the Son of God, and after which, some of his disciples had acknowledged him not as the Christ the son of David, but as the Christ the Son of God. The great object therefore of the trial would not be to ascertain whether he had professed to be the Messiah simply, either in direct or indirect terms, but to prove him a false Messiah; to prove the falsehood of one of his claims by the supposed extravagance and guilt of his other pretensions; and, in their opinion, he was proved to be a false Messiah, and to merit death, by declaring himself the Son of God.

CHAPTER V.

WHETHER THE JEWISH SANHEDRIM REALLY BELIEVED JESUS CHRIST
GUILTY OF THE CRIME FOR WHICH THEY CONDEMNED HIM.

1. Regularity of their proceedings, length of the trial, their earnestness and unanimity. 2. Their conduct on the second trial. 3. They had no material object to gain, by pronouncing Jesus guilty without being persuaded of his criminality. 4. Their sincerity appears from the silence and conduct of Christ. 5. And St Peter's address to his countrymen. 6. From a general view of the conduct of the Jewish people.

I. FROM the history of our Saviour's trial, compared with other parts of the Gospels, and the known opinions and laws of the Jews, it appears that he was pronounced guilty of blasphemy, and condemned to death for asserting his own Divinity. But, it may be objected that those, who accused him of sedition before the Roman governor, knowing the charge to be groundless, and who suborned false witnesses against him before Caiaphas, were capable of condemning him to death without being convinced of the reality of his guilt.

And, it certainly might admit of dispute, whether the supreme national court of justice consisting of seventy-two persons, were capable of immediately and unanimously¹ pronouncing the sentence of death on Jesus Christ, without believing him guilty of the crime for which he suffered: but, the question is not—what degree of wickedness that tribunal was capable of committing—but, whether unequivocal marks

¹ Mark xiv. 64.

can, or cannot be discovered, to prove the reality of their belief in his guilt. If prevarication be a proof of the insincerity of his accusers before Pilate, consistency and unanimity will probably be thought no less marks of the sincerity of his judges in the court of Caiaphas.

With respect to the witnesses, it may be observed, that those, who are called false witnesses by the Evangelists, were considered as false witnesses by the Sanhedrim; with whom their evidence had no weight. In the proceedings of the court, the rules of evidence in the Mosaic Law appear to have been strictly observed: whereas, had it been determined to put Jesus Christ to death without establishing his supposed criminality by their Law, they would probably have been satisfied with the first witness, who could attest any fact sufficiently strong for their purpose; without risking the danger of annulling the force of his testimony by introducing the contradictory evidence of others. When "two witnesses at last came," no sentence is yet pronounced, either because of inconsistency in their testimony also, or, as commentators on St Mark have supposed, because they thought the fact not sufficiently strong to convict him: *ἴσαι αἱ μαρτυρίαι οὐκ ἦσαν*, because, their evidence was inadequate, not because it was false, or contradictory. And his defence is next called for, in order, as Grotius thinks, that they might at last succeed in entangling him in his own words, after having failed in establishing his guilt by means of witnesses: or perhaps, to hear how he

explained his own words—to hear satisfactory reasons why some inferior punishment should not be inflicted, proportioned to his apparent temerity, as proved by the two last witnesses. Having made no reply, the high priest endeavours to draw from him a confession of his alleged crime: and, immediately after he had acknowledged himself the Son of God, and not before, the high priest rends his clothes, with the exclamation—“Ye have heard his blasphemy:” and the members of the court immediately and unanimously pronounce him worthy of death.

The regularity of these proceedings, the earnest manner of the high priest, and the promptitude and unanimity of the whole court, bear as strong marks of sincerity, as can accompany any public act whatever. Had they previously determined to declare him criminal, without believing him to have offended against their Law, it is unlikely that they would have proceeded by any method so circuitous and tedious. If they at length pronounced him guilty by their Law, knowing their sentence to be unjust, how is it that they should have gone through the lingering process of a long¹ examination of “many witnesses,” attending to their inconsistencies, and, at length, on account of these inconsistencies, setting aside their evidence?

II. If their backwardness in pronouncing the sentence, before they had heard our Lord’s own con-

¹ From a circumstance mentioned by St Mark, it is probable that the trial began sometime before midnight, and lasted sometime after the *second* cock-crowing. Mark xiv. 68, 72.

fession, be an argument in favour of their sincerity—the presumption will gain additional strength by the consideration of their perseverance after the first trial.

In the second trial, they, at first, endeavour to persuade Pilate, that he is guilty of treason against the Roman government; but, the great offence, they at last acknowledge, is against their own Law. “*By our Law* he ought to die”: and the reason assigned is not that, which they had just given to prove him guilty of treason, because he had called himself Messiah, a King; but, consistently with their conduct on the preceding trial, “because he made himself the Son of God.”

III. Another reason for believing the Sanhedrim to have been sincere, when they adjudged our Saviour guilty of the capital crime of blasphemy by the Mosaic Law, suggests itself in this consideration: They had no material object to gain by pronouncing him guilty of *this crime*, without being persuaded of the justice of their sentence. He was arraigned before them on the charge of blasphemy; tried, and declared guilty by their unanimous suffrages, for professing to be the Son of God: and had the punishment in this instance been in their hands, they would, on this account, have stoned him to death. But, this proof of his supposed guilt was not, as in common cases, at first intended as an intermediate step to lead to his punishment. His accusers suggested *other reasons* to Pilate, which might be supposed to have more weight, with a Roman, than the crime

of blasphemy, as ascertained by the Mosaic law. They endeavoured to convince Pilate of his treason against Cæsar, in declaring himself king of the Jews, and in stirring up the people from Galilee to Jerusalem; and it was not till the governor had acquitted him of this charge, and shown great disinclination to surrender him to the Jewish cruelty, that they were, at last, led to exclaim, “By *our Law* he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God.” His supposed crime of blasphemy was not intended to be the ostensible ground for putting him to death, or to form the matter of their accusation before Pilate; and therefore, as they had no object in solemnly asserting our Saviour guilty of this crime, knowing it to be groundless—it seems not merely the easiest, but the only method, of accounting for their conduct, to suppose that these unhappy men were sincere, when they unanimously pronounced their sentence.

If the real object of the trial before them was to discover whether Jesus had committed actions, or uttered words, which their law made blasphemous, their sentence would express their real thoughts; and if that was not, we are totally at a loss to discover what was the object of their investigation. They must have gone through the tedious process of a long trial, without any proposed end; and at last have solemnly uttered a falsehood, without any discoverable motive, and to answer no purpose. Setting aside this extravagant supposition—which, indeed, is almost without an advocate—the real object of

the trial before the Sanhedrim, we may certainly conclude, was to discover the nature and extent of our Saviour's supposed crime: after a long process, they convinced themselves of his criminality; not thinking it possible for Jesus to be the Son of God¹: the action and the words of Caiaphas, and the sentence of the whole court expressed their real thoughts: and it was principally, if not solely, on account of their conviction of his guilt, that they endeavoured to prevail on Pilate, by any reasons, which they thought likely to be effective, to put him to death.

IV. It appears not only from their own proceedings, but from the conduct of Jesus himself, that they understood the phrase "Son of God" in the same sense in which he spoke it; without any wilful misrepresentation. Had he used the expression in one sense, and perceived that it was misunderstood or wilfully perverted to another, he would have corrected the mistake, or have animadverted on the wilful perversion. This may be collected from the second trial. After he had been interrogated by Pilate, and had acknowledged himself a King, to prevent any erroneous impression from the use of

¹ They might have learnt from their Sacred Books that Jesus was placed above the Law by which he was condemned. "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken," Deut. xviii. 15. The resemblances between Moses and Jesus Christ are pointed out at great length, by Jortin (Vol. i. p. 196. *Remarks on Ecclesiastical History*, 1751.) and Sherlock (Disc. 2.) From other parts of their sacred writings, they might have known that their Messiah would be different from Moses in one particular, in being the Son of God, and God.

this term, he immediately explained his meaning, and declared that he was not an earthly, but a heavenly king:—"My kingdom is not of this world." Since, therefore, he was desirous to be rightly understood, had he only intended to announce himself as the Messiah, according to the Jewish notions of a Messiah, a mere man, when he declared himself the Son of God, he would have informed the tribunal that he merely intended to declare himself the earthly Messiah, whom they expected.

The notions of the Jewish Sanhedrim are fully expressed in the language applied by St John to another body of Jews: they believed, that "he being a man made himself God;" and not knowing that it was possible for him to be invested with Divinity, they thought him criminal. The language of his benevolent prayer is rather more consistent with this opinion, than with the notion of a wilful perversion of his meaning by the Jewish court. "Father, forgive them, for they *know not* what they do."

V. A belief that he claimed Divinity, and *an ignorance* of the possibility of the truth of this claim, are also more consistent with the language of St Peter's address to his countrymen, than a wilful perversion of our Lord's meaning. "Ye denied the Holy One and the Just...and killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead....And now, brethren, I know that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers²." That is, ye did it, not through a

² Acts iii. 14—17.

wilful perversion of his meaning, but through ignorance of his divine nature, which placed him above the law, by which he was condemned.

VI. Before one of the assemblies of the Jewish people, Jesus called God his Father: and it fully appears, from the relation of St John¹, that they *sincerely* believed him to call God his Father in such a sense as to claim Divinity; and, in consequence of their conviction, sought to put him to death.

To another body of the Jews, he said, "Before Abraham was, I am²." And that they *sincerely* believed him to have claimed in this assertion more than simple humanity, appears by an instantaneous attempt to destroy him. Before a third body of Jews, he called himself the Son of God, and declared himself one with his Father³: and they evinced the *sincerity* of their belief of his blasphemy (according to their notions of that crime) by taking up stones, in a paroxysm of rage, to destroy him. Soon after, when he had said, "The Father is in me, and I in him;" the same people again went about to take him. A fifth occurrence is related; which also shows that the Jews *really* believed our Saviour to have claimed a divine origin. "Is not this Jesus," they exclaimed, "whose father and mother we know? how is it then that he saith, I came down from heaven⁴?" On a sixth occasion; the *reality* of their belief of his blasphemy—that is, of what they thought blasphemy—is also recorded by the Evangelists, who

¹ John v.

² John viii.

³ Ch. x.

⁴ Ch. vi.

have mentioned that certain scribes said *within themselves*, "Who is this that speaketh blasphemy?" On the seventh occasion; when he had declared himself the Son of God before that body of Jews called the Sanhedrim—the president immediately rent his clothes, and exclaimed, "Ye have heard his blasphemy;" and they *all* immediately pronounced the sentence of death. A connected view of the six preceding cases enables us to decide, with moral certainty, were there any preceding doubt, on the *sincerity* of the Sanhedrim in the seventh.

^s Luke v. 17. and Matthew ix. 3.

CHAPTER VI.

ON THE INTERPRETATION OF THE WORDS OF JESUS CHRIST, BY HIS CONTEMPORARIES AND COUNTRYMEN.

1. The general opinion of readers of the New Testament, on the meaning of the passages in it relating to the nature of Christ. Different methods of explaining difficulties in ancient Authors. The sense, in which an Author has been understood by subsequent writers, not far removed from his own age, important. The sense, in which the New Testament was understood by Celsus and other ancient heathens, probably just. The general concurrence of the Christian writers of the first centuries, in any one opinion relating to the sense of certain passages in Scripture, affords a strong presumption of the truth of that opinion. 2. Interpretation of the words of a speaker by his hearers. Concurrence of different bodies of hearers in the same interpretation proves the interpretation just. Dr Priestley's opinion of the importance of the interpretation of words by those to whom they are addressed. His method of collecting the interpretation of the New Testament by the first Gentile Christians. 3. Concurrence of several bodies of Jews and of the Roman governor in annexing the same sense to the words of Christ. Their interpretation confirmed by the acquiescence of Christ himself and the Evangelists. 4. Whether the Jews supposed Christ to allude to the doctrine of transubstantiation.

I. THE opinion of the Jews, respecting the nature and extent of our Saviour's claims, evinced on many occasions by their words and actions, is of some importance in confirming one of the leading doctrines of the New Testament, which has sometimes been called in question. Though the Divinity of Christ seems to have been frequently taught, both by himself and his Apostles, in terms too plain to be easily misunderstood—*Christians* have not, however, been perfectly unanimous in this opinion. Jews, Mahometans, and perhaps all men who have read the New Testament, a small though respectable body of

Christians excepted, have found this amongst its other doctrines. The Jews insist on this point with just confidence; and on this ground offer their most plausible apology for the conduct of their ancestors. Mahometans contend for the same thing; but adventurously assert that *our Scriptures* contain not the tenets which Christ taught; and refer to Apocryphal works for the genuine representation of Christianity¹. If the readers of the New Testament be divided into two classes—believers in Christianity and unbelievers—it might be proposed as a question; whether any individual in the latter class ever persuaded himself that the New Testament contains no such doctrine as that of Christ's Divinity: and were it not from respect to that body of Christians, to which I have just alluded, it would be superfluous and idle (as it appears to all but Christians) to prove the existence of a Christian doctrine, which is almost universally admitted.

Let all the passages, however, on this subject, be supposed so obscure, that their meaning cannot be collected with certainty by an immediate comparison with the context, and that recourse must be had to the usual means for solving difficulties in common authors.

When difficulties occur in an ancient writer, a commentator sometimes endeavours to explain differ-

¹ Mahomet himself took his account of Christianity from the Gospel of Christ's infancy, the Prot-evangelium of James, and other spurious works. See Jones on the Canon, p. 584. and 589. The Gospel of Barnabas, which modern Mahometans have used, is a forgery of later date.

ent parts of his writings by comparing them with one another; and sometimes he discovers the signification of a doubtful word or phrase in his author by comparing it, in the same manner, with passages collected from the works of others, who lived in or near the same age. In this way the Gospels have been explained by themselves, by one another, by the Acts of the Apostles, by the Epistles, by Philo, and by Josephus. And thus, most writings of nearly the same age reflect mutual light on each other.

Sometimes ancient authors are elucidated by comparing them with others of higher antiquity; whose language and train of thought they may sometimes have taken up. To understand the scope of their reasoning and the force of their allusions, it is frequently necessary to compare their writings with the originals, which they had in view. It is thus that the industry of our divines has been rationally and successfully exerted in explaining the New Testament by the Old.

It is of some importance also to know in what sense a passage in an ancient author has been understood by subsequent writers, not far removed from his own age; or what design they discovered in his writings, on a general view of their contents. If we knew in what sense an expression in Virgil was interpreted by Quintilian, or what Columella conceived to be one of the objects which the poet has pursued in his Georgics, their opinions would have great weight in deciding ours. On this account, the opinions of the more ancient Christian writers after

the Apostles, and of learned and philosophical heathens, respecting the doctrines of the New Testament, as well as their interpretations of particular passages in it, are circumstances, which it requires much self-importance to despise.

When Celsus, a heathen Philosopher, little more than a century after the event of which he speaks, declares that Christ asserted his own Divinity¹, *his* testimony would deserve great credit, though he had not mentioned his authority; and when we know, that Celsus found the Divinity of Christ acknowledged in the Gospel of St Matthew², it is, *on this account*, highly probable, that this doctrine has really a place in that Gospel. A common passage in a Greek book, written about a century before his own age, would hardly be misunderstood by Celsus.

If both the heathens³ in a very early age, and the whole body of Christian writers in the first three centuries, almost without exception, agree in representing this doctrine as taught in the New Testament; and have quoted a multitude of passages from it relating to the Divinity of Christ, which were understood by them as they are understood by

¹ Θεὸν αὐτὸν ἀνηγόρευσε. Celsus ap. Origen. L. i. p. 22.

² Ch. ii. 11. Μετὰ ταῦτα ὁ παρὰ τῷ Κέλσῳ Ἰουδαῖος ἀντὶ τῶν ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ μάγων “Χαλδαίους” φησὶν “ὑπὸ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ λελέχθαι, κινήθέντας ἐπὶ τῇ γενέσει αὐτοῦ ἐληλυθέναι προσκυνήσοντας αὐτὸν ἔτι νῆπιον ὡς θεόν.” Orig. cont. Cels. L. i. p. 45.

³ The heathens asserted that the *disciples* of Christ were guilty of falsehood in declaring him God. “*Discipulos ejus non solum de illo fuisse mentitos dicendo illum Deum, per quem facta sunt omnia.*” Augustin. de consensu Evang. L. i. c. xxxiv.

us; the concurrence of so many competent judges, so near the time when it was written, whose views, interests and opinions, were so various—the concurrence of so many and such men in any one opinion—creates a strong presumption that the opinion is just. It is important to know in what sense the Fathers understood the New Testament, not because they were Christians, but because they lived near the time when it was written, and had read it with attention. Those who live only a century or two after the age of an Author, must sometimes enter into the design and spirit of his work, when they are not so well comprehended fifteen hundred years later. When we allow, and it cannot be denied, that they frequently show themselves injudicious and ill-informed commentators on the New Testament, we grant that the opinion of any one, or, even of a considerable number of them respecting the doctrines of this book, ought not to have any very great weight. But the concurrence of the whole body of Ante-nicene Fathers, almost without exception, in any one sentiment, when they differ from one another, or are inconsistent with themselves on most other subjects, is surely of some importance. The Scriptures, in their opinion, taught the co-existence and consubstantiality of the Son with the Father: yet, it is always acknowledged that they generally contended for a sort of inferiority in the Son¹: and “the inferiority of the Son to the Father

¹ “You argue against our Lord’s Divinity...from the manner in which he speaks of himself, saying, ‘My Father is greater than I.’ If from such

shown to have been the doctrine of all the Ante-nicene Fathers" is the title of one of the chapters of Dr Priestley's History of early opinions. Here, however, they apparently differed from themselves. Attempting to explain a subject beyond the reach of the human mind, they naturally fell into inconsistencies. "It is remarkable that, though all the Ante-nicene Fathers were of opinion that the Son derived his being from the *substance of the Father*, and before his generation was even his own proper wisdom, power, and all his other essential attributes, they uniformly asserted that he was *inferior to the Father*, and subject to him. This was certainly unnatural, and a real inconsistency. For, admitting the Son to be *what they represented him*, he was, to say the least, *fully equal* to every thing that could constitute the Father²." Respecting the equality of the Son to the Father, they differed, in language at least, from themselves, but, their very inconsistencies on this subject prove the uniformity of their belief in the Divinity of Christ, as a doctrine of Scripture. They were inconsistent with themselves, and disagreed with one another, about matters of comparatively little moment: they agreed in the main. It was one of Origen's singularities to maintain, that

such expressions you would be content to infer, that the Almighty Father is indeed the fountain and the center of Divinity, and that the equality of God-head is to be understood with some mysterious subordination of the Son to the Father; you would have the concurrence of the ancient Fathers, and of many advocates of the true faith in all ages." Horsley's 15th Letter to Priestley, p. 145. 1784. [p 291. ed. 1812.]

² History of early Opinions, B. II. c. iv. p. 145.

prayer ought not to be offered to the Son, but to the Father through the Son: yet Origen was a strenuous vindicator of the doctrine of Christ's Divinity. The extraordinary concurrence of these early readers of the New Testament, strengthened by the united opinion of their adversaries among the heathens, forms altogether a body of authority, which a man of sound reason, tolerable information, and common modesty, cannot overlook.

II. Another method of determining the meaning of difficult passages in ancient Authors, though not totally neglected, has not been applied with much success to confirm or refute the commonly received interpretation of the parts of the New Testament relating to the nature of Christ. The method, to which I allude, is that by which the sense of a passage is collected from the interpretation of persons, to whom it was immediately addressed, of the same age and country with the speaker or writer. When Demosthenes addressed the Athenian people, in terms, some of which are not perfectly intelligible to us, had history been so minute as to inform us in what sense they were understood by his hearers, we should probably submit to have our opinions on the meaning of expressions in the Greek language regulated by theirs. And were we informed on good authority, that the same, or equivalent expressions of the Athenian orator, were understood in the same sense by two different bodies of the Athenian people, at different times—and that the court of Areopagus had

unanimously agreed to act in conformity to the same interpretation—such a coincidence would raise probability into certainty; and we should be sceptical indeed not to submit to such a combination of authorities, without the slightest fear of being misled.

A remarkable coincidence, similar to this, in the interpretation of the same or equivalent phrases by different bodies of people, is recorded in the Evangelical history. On one occasion, when our Saviour called God his Father, a body of Jewish people sought to stone him, because he professed to be *the Son of God*, in such a sense as to make himself equal with God. On a second occasion, another body of Jewish people exclaimed; “We stone thee for blasphemy, and because thou, being a man, makest thyself God.” And it appears by the context, that this was because he had called himself *the Son of God*, and professed to be one with his Father. After this, the Sanhedrim also, the Areopagus of Jerusalem, unanimously pronounced him guilty of the capital crime of blasphemy for teaching his Divinity, in professing to be *the Son of God*.

Admitting then that, when Christ calls God his Father, or himself the Son of God, these phrases (which are equivalent) appear of doubtful signification to us: had only one body of his countrymen and contemporaries shown the sense, in which they understood them, our doubts would be, in a great degree, removed; but, when different people, in different situations, concur in proving both by words and actions their decided conviction of the real existence

of his claims to Divinity, we have all the certainty on the subject, that history can afford.

When we read any author, our purpose is to know the state and train of his thoughts, when he wrote or spoke the words, which fall under our consideration. If the words, by reason of any obscurity or ambiguity, fail of leading us to this object, the best medium for discovering his thoughts is the sense (when it can be clearly ascertained) in which he was understood by his hearers, or by those, to whom he wrote, of his own age and country.

If in one of Cicero's Letters to Atticus, expressions occur, which to us appear ambiguous—had history incidentally recorded any minute circumstance pointing out in what sense they were understood by Atticus, we should have little doubt of what the writer intended by them. The contemporaries and countrymen of any writer, who speak the same language, and are conversant about the same objects, are the best judges of the train and state of his thoughts: and his words, when erroneously or imperfectly understood by others, would to them mostly appear in their real and adequate meaning.

A Philosopher of the present age has considered the interpretation of contemporaries as a means of discovering, with certainty, whether the Divinity or simple humanity of Christ be taught in the New Testament¹; and has completed a controversial His-

¹ "But this historical discussion, when the nature of it is well considered, cannot but be thought to decide concerning the whole controversy: for, if it be true, as I have endeavoured to prove by copious historical evidence, not only that the proper Unitarians were in communion

tory, and an historical controversy of several thousand pages, for the purpose of determining in what sense the historical and epistolary parts of the New Testament were understood by the *Christians* to whom they were addressed. His purpose in these works is best stated in his own words, "The proper object of my work is to ascertain, what must have been *the sense of the books of Scripture*, from the sense, in which they were actually understood by those, for whose use they were composed, and to determine what must have been the sentiments of the Apostles, by means of the opinions of those, who received their instruction from them only²."

Could the interpretation of the New Testament, by the very first Christians, be clearly ascertained, its importance would be fully admitted. The sense in which they understood language, most of which was addressed first to the Jews, and next to the world at large, would be highly valuable, not because they were Christians indeed, but because they were contemporaries of Christ and his Apostles; and more particularly, because many of them were Jewish contemporaries. But, this interpretation has *not* been discovered by Dr Priestley; and the legitimacy of

munion with the established Church, and were not classed with Heretics; but, that the great body of unlearned Christians continued to be simply Unitarians till the second and third century, it will hardly be doubted, but that their instructors, viz. the Apostles and first disciples of Christ were Unitarians also; and therefore that no other interpretation of the Scriptures than that of the Unitarians, as opposed to that of the Trinitarians or Arians, *can be* the true one." Pref. to Letters to Dr Horne.

² Letter to Parkhurst, p. 2.

every part of the prescriptive argument, by which he has attempted to ascertain the religious opinions of the first Christians, and through them, the sense in which they understood the books of Scripture, may reasonably be called in question. If the language of Scripture be not clear on this subject, he has fallen into a common fault of commentators, by attempting to explain what is obscure by a greater obscurity.

When a reader tries to discover the sense of an ancient book by means of certain mediums—the mediums themselves ought to be clear, or it will be safer to apply, without their intervention, directly to the original. A very ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament is extant at this day: we have also some ancient paraphrases of the same book; very ancient versions of the New Testament in different languages; and Latin translations of some common Greek Authors have likewise reached our times; but no critic would think of explaining passages in the originals by means of *obscure and ambiguous* sentences in the versions. It is only when the original is doubtful, that we need the assistance of the version; and it is only when the version is clear, that we can avail ourselves of its assistance.

To apply a similar remark to the subject in question: several passages in the New Testament appear to a vast majority of Christians, and perhaps to *all* its other readers, to teach the Divinity of Christ. Some of them are generally thought to contain this doctrine very clearly. But, suppose them all doubt-

ful—we should not attempt to discover their meaning by the sense, in which they were understood by the first Christians, unless their interpretation of them were clearly and decisively made out.

Dr Priestley has adopted the following method of proving the interpretation of the *first Gentile Christians*. He first fully admits, that the rulers of the Christian church, and the learned in general in the second and third centuries, believed in the Divinity of Christ; and, guarding against the conclusion, which results from the usual method of collecting the popular opinions of any age from the general spirit of the writings of that age, he supposes, and endeavours to prove, by the testimonies of Tertullian and Origen, that the great body of the *common people*, at the end of the second century and the beginning of the third, were Unitarians; that they maintained opinions directly opposite to those of the learned in that and some following ages; that the teachers were of one opinion, and the people taught of another¹.

On this hypothesis, the opinions of either the learned or the unlearned must have undergone a total change. Then, reasoning on this supposed principle of human nature, that the common people are *less* liable to change than the learned, he concludes

¹ “*The distinction of the opinion of the early writers, from that of the common people, was never before observed by any one; and being a thing wholly unknown to the first Socinians, they were exceedingly embarrassed in the defence of their sentiments, in point of antiquity.*” Lindsey, *Vindiciæ Priestleianæ*, p. 341. Dr Priestley’s *discovery* has effectually relieved them from the embarrassments, in which history and common sense had involved them.

that Unitarianism was the universal religion of the very first Christians about a hundred and fifty years before the age of Tertullian; and thence next infers, that no other doctrine can be taught in the New Testament¹.

Without examining the several steps, which lead to this conclusion—it is obvious, that the interpretation of the first Christians, established only by such circuitous and uncertain, not to say false, reasoning, can never be admitted as a medium for discovering the true sense of passages in the Scriptures, or any other book. A similar attempt to ascertain the true meaning of any sentence or collection of sentences in Homer would not be answered by serious argument, but would be instantly exploded with just ridicule. The interpretation of contemporaries, by which Dr Priestley has endeavoured to ascertain the sense of scripture, is of very considerable importance; but he has not succeeded in discovering it. His fundamental principle is just; but he has failed in its application.

It may not be uninteresting to consider whether his own principle may not be successfully employed in defence of the opinions, which it was intended to overturn; and whether *his* Theological system

¹ "Tertullian represents the majority of the common or unlearned Christians, the Idiotæ, as Unitarians; and it is among the common people that we always find the oldest opinions in any country, and in any sect, while the learned are most apt to innovate. It may therefore be presumed that, as the Unitarian doctrine was held by the common people in the time of Tertullian, it had been more general still before that time, and probably universal in the Apostolic age." Letters to Dr Horsley, Part I. p. 146. [p. 136. ed. 1815.]

will, in its turn, stand the test of his own Canons of Criticism.

III. The Jews of our Saviour's age spoke the same language that he spoke: he had read their sacred books; he had submitted to their laws; their manners and customs were familiar to him; the objects, about which he was conversant, natural, moral, religious and political, were continually presented to their minds also. If we, by deliberately comparing different parts of the New and Old Testament with one another, are sometimes enabled to discover his meaning, when they comprehended it but imperfectly, it would more frequently happen that his countrymen and contemporaries would see the full force of his words, when they are not so fully understood by us. We are not to appeal to the Jews of his time, as the best judges of the truth of his doctrines; but we may confidently appeal to them as competent *interpreters of words* spoken in their own language, addressed to them, intended first for their information, and next, for that of the whole world. Of the meaning of these words, our Saviour's contemporaries and countrymen were unquestionably the best judges; and his contemporaries and countrymen were convinced that he claimed Divinity. This circumstance is not notified to us in general terms only, nor are we left to deduce it by doubtful inference, from a supposed state of public opinion a hundred and fifty years after his age; but his words on different occasions are distinctly related by four histo-

rians of his own age, who were themselves Jews, and some of whom were eye-witnesses of the events which they have recorded. At the same time that they have recorded his words, they have sometimes expressly mentioned, and sometimes strongly marked, by the relation of incidental circumstances, the sense in which they were understood by different bodies of the Jewish people.

The Evangelists have not left the Jewish interpretation of our Saviour's words to rest solely on their own assertions; though these would have been decisive. They have mentioned also, at the same time, the words and actions of the Jews, from which we may draw the same conclusions, for our own satisfaction.

They have related, that the high priest rent his clothes, and declared that Christ had spoken blasphemy; that the supreme court of judicature of Jerusalem unanimously pronounced him guilty of a capital crime; that one body of the Jews attempted to stone him for making himself equal with God; and that another body of Jews also took up stones to stone him, alleging as a reason for their attempt, that he, being a man, made himself God: and, the words of our Lord, to which this sense had been annexed by the Jews on all these occasions, were contained in the declaration, that God was his Father, or in the equivalent assertion, that he was the Son of God.

The concurrence of several bodies of Jews in annexing the same sense to the words of Christ, independently of any further consideration, falls little short of actual demonstration. But the truth of

their interpretation is also confirmed by the silence of the Evangelists, with respect to any perversion or mistake of the Jews, on this subject. Had the Jews always misunderstood our Saviour, when he called God his Father, or himself the Son of God, when he declared himself one with the Father, or when he assumed the power of forgiving sins; had they conceived him to have claimed Divinity, while he only professed to be the Messiah, a prophet, a man favoured of heaven, a just man, or a mere man like themselves; the writers of the New Testament must have frequently and strongly animadverted on so remarkable a mistake: and their silence on the subject is a proof that no such mistake existed. This remark will have the more weight, when it is recollected that the Evangelists have adverted to less important occasions, on which the Jews erroneously or imperfectly comprehended their master's meaning.

It is not by their silence *only* that the Evangelists have confirmed the truth of the Jewish interpretation: On one occasion the language of St John's narrative clearly proves that, in his opinion, their interpretation was just. He describes one of their attempts or consultations in these words: "Therefore, the Jews sought the more to kill him, not only because he had broken the sabbath; but, said also that God was his *proper* Father. Ὅτι οὐ μόνον ἔλυε τὸ σάββατον, ἀλλὰ καὶ πατέρα ἴδιον ἔλεγε τὸν Θεόν· making himself equal with God."

Had St John's interpretation of the words of Christ been different from that of the Jews, this

sentence must have had some qualification to point out the difference. He would not have affirmed that Jesus actually "called God his proper Father, making himself equal with God;" but that the Jews mistakenly believed him to have done so; whereas, as the passage now stands, it contains a positive declaration from St John himself, that Christ called God his Father, in such a sense, as to make himself equal with God. This single testimony would fully prove the Divinity of Christ to be one of the doctrines of our religion.

Had only a single individual among the Jews, or one body of people, shown the sense in which they understood the language of Christ, relating to his own nature, we should not be perfectly free from suspicions of a mistake; but the same interpretation of his words is to be observed among several different bodies and different classes of men. He was understood in the same sense by the common people, the scribes, the pharisees, and the great national tribunal. The magistrate and the subject, the learned and the ignorant, the inhabitant of the city and the country, the Jew and the Roman¹, unite their suffrages in deciding this question. Their interpretation is determined by the conjoint evidence of their words and actions; it was acquiesced in by Christ himself; and is confirmed by the manner, in which it is recorded by the Evangelists.

¹ It has frequently and justly been observed, that the interpretation of the phrase, "Son of God," by Pilate the Roman governor, is determined by his question; "Whence art thou?" after the Jews had informed him, that Jesus had "made himself the Son of God."

IV. The interpretation of our Saviour's words by *one body* of the Jewish people is collected from the conference in the sixth Chapter of St John. In the opinion of some Christians, the doctrine of transubstantiation, as well as that of Christ's Divinity, may be proved from the interpretation of the Jews, as described in the account of the same conference. In answer to this we may observe—

1. The Divinity of Christ is proved to be a doctrine of the New Testament, not by the interpretation of *one body* of Jews, but by an immense mass of various evidence.

2. When he declares himself “the bread of life,” “the bread which came down from heaven”—“except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you”—“My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed,” &c. the question is simply, whether this and similar language is literal or metaphorical. We, who know that Christ *afterwards* taught the doctrine of his atonement, supposing this language figurative, find the metaphors harsh indeed, but perfectly intelligible. This is one of the few instances, where we have an advantage over his hearers. His Jewish hearers would mostly have a thorough comprehension of his meaning, when it is not quite so fully seen by us; here, for want of a key, which we possess, they would be unable to understand him. The doctrine of his atonement was unknown to them; and therefore to most of them this language must have been unintelligible.

But his Jewish hearers understood him to speak literally; and this was the cause of their murmurs,

(ver. 14) their strife, (ver. 52) and the secession of many of his disciples (ver. 60).

If this be really so, let their interpretation have all the weight which, under their circumstances, it deserves. Let the fact, however, be first examined. He informed them, that he was "*the bread* which came down from heaven;" and they asked in murmurs, "How is it that he saith, *I* came down from heaven?" They were not offended because he declared himself "*the bread*," but because he affirmed that he came from heaven: that is, they understood that part of his language, which some suppose to relate to the doctrine of transubstantiation, figuratively; that part, which is commonly believed to refer to his divine origin, literally. After this, it only appears that his metaphorical language seemed to them harsh and unintelligible. "Many of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is a hard saying, who can hear it? (ver. 60.) How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" *How?* i. e. *In what sense* can he give us his flesh to eat? In what metaphor is he speaking? Their decisive interpretation can never be collected from a question which seems only to express their doubts: it cannot be concluded, that they understood him *literally*, from language, which only proves that he was not understood at all.

CHAPTER VII.

THE INTERPRETATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT, BY THE FIRST
JEWISH CHRISTIANS, COLLECTED FROM THEIR RELIGIOUS OPINIONS.

1. The opinions of the first Jewish Christians might be inferred from those of the unbelieving Jews. Their opinions may be determined by historical Testimony. 2. Dr Horsley's statement of the testimony in the Epistle of Barnabas. "The Author, a Christian of the Hebrews—a believer in our Lord's Divinity—writes to Christians of the Hebrews, concurring in the same belief."

I. THE unbelieving Jews were fully convinced that Jesus claimed Divinity. On this account, they at different times attempted to put him to death; and at length carried their bloody purpose into execution. It is therefore perfectly in character, that the unbelieving Jew in Celsus is continually accusing Christ, for declaring himself God: and Origen, constantly on the watch for errors of any sort in the work of his antagonist, has given no intimation of the impropriety of this language. All descriptions of the Jews believed Christ to have asserted his divine nature. And since there could be no medium between rejecting him as an impostor, and admitting all his claims, it seems a necessary consequence, that the great body of Jewish converts to Christianity, in the first age of the church, would believe in his Divinity. We need not however, in this instance, form our opinions by deductions either from a preceding or a subsequent fact. We are not necessari-

tated to conclude, from the opinions of the unbelieving Jews respecting the claims of Christ, what were the religious opinions of the first Jewish Christians; nor must we, with Dr Priestley, collect the tenets of the great body of Jewish Christians of the first century, from those of a small part of them under the name of Ebionites at the end of the second; because in points of mere history, when positive *testimony* is to be had, it would be idle to be satisfied with doubtful or even probable *reasoning*.

In considering this like any other historical question, the first remarkable circumstance is the total want of testimony on one side. No ancient writer has recorded, that the great body of Jewish Christians in the first century disbelieved the Divinity of Christ. But, the testimony on the other side will deserve great attention.

II. It has long been decided, by the almost unanimous suffrages of the learned, that the Author of the Epistle of Barnabas wrote in the first century. His design seems to have been the same with that of St Paul—to convince the Jewish, and probably Gentile Christians also, to whom he addressed himself, of the inutility of the ceremonial law. This he endeavoured to prove, by pointing out to them in what the true spiritual Law of Moses consists; showing that different parts of the Christian system contain the substance, of which the Mosaic ceremonies are only types.

Whether his Epistle was intended for the use of some one church, or more than one, as the title (Catholic), prefixed to it by Origen, intimates—whether it was addressed to Gentiles only, or to a miscellaneous body of Jews and Gentiles, such as constituted most of the primitive churches, or, to an unmixed assembly of Jewish Christians—it appears with as much probability as is often attainable in matters of ancient History, that they were believers in the Divinity of Christ.

The ancient Latin Version, which is mutilated, seems to have been taken from a purer text¹ than

¹ “To say nothing of the doubts entertained by many learned men concerning the genuineness of this Epistle, the most that is possible to be admitted is, that it is genuine in the main. For, whether you may have observed it or not, it is most evidently interpolated, and the interpolations respect the very subject of which we treat. Two passages in the Greek, which assert the pre-existence of Christ, are omitted in the ancient Latin version of it. And can it be supposed that that version was made in an age in which such an omission was likely to be made? Both the interpolations are in sect. 6. where we now read thus: λέγει γὰρ ἡ γραφή περὶ ἡμῶν, ὡς λέγει τῷ υἱῷ, ποιήσωμεν κατ’ εἰκόνα καὶ καθ’ ὁμοίωσιν ἡμῶν, τὸν ἄνθρωπον. *For the Scripture says concerning us, as he says to the Son, Let us make man according to our image and our likeness.* But, the ancient Latin version corresponding to this passage, is simply this, Sicut dicit Scriptura, Faciamus hominem, &c. i. e. *As says the Scripture, Let us make man.*

“Again, in the same section, after quoting from Moses, ‘*Increase and multiply, and replenish the earth,*’ the Greek copy has ταῦτα πρὸς τὸν υἱόν—*these things to the Son*; but in the old Latin version the clause is wholly omitted; and certainly there is no want of it, or of the similar clause in the former passage, with respect to the general object of the writer. These, Sir, appear to me pretty evident marks of interpolation.

“The passage on which *you lay the chief stress*, is only in the Latin version; that part of the Greek copy, to which it corresponds, being now lost; and all the other expressions that you note are such as an Unitarian will find no difficulty in accommodating to his principles. On these accounts, your evidence from this Epistle of Barnabas will by

that of the Greek copy now extant, which is also much mutilated. The Author's belief of the Divinity of Christ is clearly collected from passages found in both; and his opinion on that subject is identified with that of the Christians, to whom his letter is addressed. I shall state the evidence, from which this inference may be drawn, in the words of Dr Horsley; without, however, being convinced, that the great body of people, to whom the Epistle was addressed, consisted of *Jewish* Christians.

“I suppose, however, that you will allow, what all allow, that the book is a production of the apostolic age: in the fifth section of your history of the doctrine of atonement, you quote it among the writings of the apostolic Fathers. I think it fair to remind you of this circumstance, lest you should hastily advance a contrary opinion, when you find the testimony of this writer turned against you. You allow him a place then among the Fathers of the apostolic age: and will you not allow that he was a believer in our Lord's Divinity? I will not take upon me, Sir, to answer this question for you; but I will take upon me to say, that whoever denies it, must deny it to his own shame. “The Lord, says Barnabas, submitted to suffer for our soul, although

no means bear the stress that you lay upon it.” Letters to the Archdeacon of St Alban's, Part II. p. 7. [pp. 171, 172. ed. 1815.]

The reason assigned by Dr Priestley for supposing the Latin version interpolated will never be admitted by the critics. “Can it be thought at all improbable,” he asks, “that if one person interpolated the Greek, another should make as free with the Latin version?”

he be THE LORD OF THE WHOLE EARTH, unto whom he said, the day before the world was finished, Let us make man after our image and our likeness¹." Again, "— for if he had not come in the flesh, how could we mortals seeing him have been preserved; when they who behold the sun, which is to perish and is the work of his hands, are unable to look directly against its rays²?" Compare Deut. xviii. 16. Exod. xxxiii. 20. Judges vi. 23. and xiii. 22. Again "—— if then the Son of God, being Lord, and being to judge the quick and dead, suffered to the end that his wound might make us alive; let us believe that the Son of God had no power to suffer had it not been for us³." And again, "Mean while thou hast [the whole doctrine] concerning the majesty of Christ; how all things were made for him and through him; to whom be honour, power, and glory, now and for ever⁴." He who penned these sentences was surely a devout believer in our Lord's Divinity. It is needless to observe, that he was a Christian; and almost as needless to observe that

¹ Dominus sustinuit pati pro animâ nostrâ, cum sit orbis terrarum dominus, cui dixit die ante constitutionem sæculi, "Faciamus hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram." § v.

² ——— εἰ γὰρ μὴ ἦλθεν ἐν σαρκί, πῶς ἂν ἐσώθημεν ἄνθρωποι βλέποντες αὐτόν; ὅτι τὸν μέλλοντα μὴ εἶναι ἥλιον, ἔργον χειρῶν αὐτοῦ ὑπάρχοντα, οὐκ ἰσχύουσιν εἰς ἀκτῖνας ἀντοφθαλμῆσαι. § v.

³ ——— εἰ οὖν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ, ὃν Κύριος, καὶ μέλλων κρίνειν ζῶντας καὶ νεκροὺς, ἔπαθεν, ἵνα ἡ πληγὴ αὐτοῦ ζωοποιήσῃ ἡμᾶς· πιστεύσωμεν, ὅτι ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ οὐκ ἠδύνατο παθεῖν, εἰ μὴ διὰ ἡμᾶς. § vii.

⁴ Habes interim de majestate Christi, quo modo omnia in illum et per illum facta sunt: cui sit honor, virtus, gloria, nunc et in sæcula sæculorum. § xvii.

he had been a Jew. For in that age none but a person bred in Judaism could possess that minute knowledge of the Jewish rites, which is displayed in this book. In the writer therefore of the Epistle of St Barnabas, we have one instance of a Hebrew Christian of the apostolic age, who believed in our Lord's Divinity.

“ But this is not all. They must have been originally Jews to whom this epistle was addressed. The discourse supposes them well acquainted with the Jewish rites, which are the chief subject of it: and indeed to any not bred in Judaism the book had been uninteresting and unintelligible. They were Hebrew Christians therefore, to whom a brother of the circumcision holds up the doctrine of our Lord's Divinity. He upholds it, not barely as his own persuasion, but as an article of their common faith. He brings no arguments to prove it—he employs no rhetoric to recommend it. He mentions it as occasion occurs, without showing any anxiety to inculcate it, or any apprehension, that it would be denied or doubted. He mentions it in that unhesitating language, which implies that the public opinion stood with his own. So that in this writer we have not only an instance of an Hebrew Christian, of the apostolic age, holding the doctrine of our Lord's Divinity; but in the book we have the clearest evidence, that this was the common faith of the Hebrew Christians of that age, or in other words, of the primitive church of Jerusalem.

“This, Sir, is the proof, which I had to produce, of the consent of that church with the later Gentile churches, in this great article. It is so direct and full, though it lies in a narrow compass, that if this be laid in one scale, and your whole mass of evidence, drawn from incidental and ambiguous allusions, in the other,

“The latter will fly up, and kick the beam¹.”

¹ Letters in reply to Priestley, pp. 66—68. [pp. 184—187. ed. 1812.]

CHAPTER VIII.

THE INTERPRETATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT, BY THE FIRST
JEWISH CHRISTIANS, COLLECTED FROM THEIR RELIGIOUS OPINIONS.

1.—2. Misstatements of the testimonies of Justin Martyr and Irenæus, on the subject of the Jewish Christians corrected.

I. THE testimony of Justin Martyr, a native of Samaria, who was converted to Christianity, A.D. 133, would be valuable; had he left any regular account of the religious opinions of the Jewish Christians even of his own time. And had he any where declared what were the tenets of the great body of this people in the first century, his testimony would be conclusive. But, he has neither described the tenets of the great body of Jewish Christians of his own time, nor mentioned those of the first century; and it is not without the utmost surprise that we find his name and that of Irenæus¹ brought forward to countenance a most unwarranted assertion on this subject.

“*Originally* the Jewish Christians did not believe the doctrine of the miraculous conception. Both Justin Martyr and Irenæus represent them as disbe-

¹ The assertion relating to the testimony of Irenæus is repeated in the fourth Volume of the History of early Opinions. “*All the Jewish Christians are by Irenæus called Ebionites, and he always describes them as believing Jesus to have been the son of Joseph.*” p. 318. It is curious that this should have been affirmed of Irenæus, when he has treated on the Cerinthians in the same chapter with the Ebionites.

lieving it, without excepting any that did²." The use of this language, without any citation or reference, is extremely objectionable; because it might create a belief, in common readers, that Justin and Irenæus had described the tenets of the *original* Jewish Christians. Irenæus, however, has written nothing on the subject. In his account of the heresies which preceded that of Valentinus, he mentions the Ebionites, who disbelieved the miraculous conception and Divinity of Christ, and has stigmatized them as heretics; but, *when* they arose, and whether they formed a large or a small portion of the Jewish Christians—on these topics he is totally silent.

The whole testimony of Justin, relating to this subject, may soon be collected. In one part of his Dialogue he observes, "There *are some* of our race (ἀπὸ τοῦ ἡμετέρου γένους) who acknowledge him to be Christ; yet maintain that he was a man, born of human parents; with whom I do not agree; no, not even if the majority should inform me that they entertained these sentiments³," &c.

The ἡμέτερον γένος of Justin is supposed by some to mean Jews and Samaritans⁴: by Dr Priestley and his Vindicator it is considered as referring to Gentile

² History of early Opinions, Vol. III. p. 202.

³ Καὶ γὰρ εἰσὶ τινες ἀπὸ τοῦ ἡμετέρου γένους ὁμολογοῦντες αὐτὸν Χριστὸν εἶναι, ἀνθρώπον δὲ ἐξ ἀνθρώπων γενόμενον ἀποφαινόμενοι· οἷς οὐ συντίθεται, οὐδ' ἂν πλείστοι ταῦτά μοι δοξάσαντες εἴποιεν, ἐπεὶ δὴ οὐκ ἀνθρωπίοις διδάγμασι κεκελεύσμεθα ὑπ' αὐτοῦ τοῦ Χριστοῦ πείθεσθαι, ἀλλὰ τοῖς διὰ τῶν μακαρίων προφητῶν κηρυχθεῖσι, καὶ δι' αὐτοῦ διδασχθεῖσι. Dialog. p. 235.

⁴ Bingham, Vindication of the Doctrine and Liturgy of the Church of England, p. 23. 8vo. 1774.

converts, (on which supposition, the testimony has no connection with the present subject of inquiry): and it may, consistently with the language of Justin, stand for Christians in general. In another place, speaking of *all Christians*, he observes, Ἰσραηλιτικὸν γὰρ τὸ ἀληθινόν, πνευματικόν... γένος ἡμεῖς ἐσμέν¹. In this case also, nothing could be concluded respecting the tenets of all or any part of the Jewish Christians in particular.

Whichever supposition we take, whether he be speaking of Samaritan and Jewish, or Gentile Christians, or Christians in general, the common rules of grammar compel us to conclude, in opposition to the interpretation of Dr Priestley² and his Vindicator, that *some* of them were Unitarians, but that the great body were of another opinion. He is speaking also, it must be observed, of persons of his own time (A.D. 140), not of the *original* Christians, whether Gentiles or Jews. He is so far from representing “the Jewish Christians as originally not believing the doctrine of the miraculous conception, without excepting any that did”—that he never mentions the faith of the *original* Jewish Christians at all; and he has no where intimated that all, or any considerable part of those of his own time, disbelieved the Divinity of Christ.

¹ P. 159, ed. Thirlby.

² “By my Vindicator rendered more literally:—‘There are some of our race, viz. Gentiles, who acknowledge him to be the Christ, and yet maintain that he was a man born in the natural way; to whom I do not assent, though the majority *may have told me* that they had been of the same opinion.’” Letters to Dr Horsley, Part 1. p. 127. [p. 120. ed. 1815.]

II. Another misrepresentation on this subject must not be unnoticed. Justin has been made to give evidence relating to a matter on which he has said nothing whatever. His evidence is brought to prove that all Christians of Jewish extraction were both Unitarians, and observed the Mosaic ritual.

“Justin Martyr makes no mention of Ebionites, but he speaks of the Jewish Christians, which has been proved to be a synonymous expression; and it is plain that he did not consider all of them as heretics, but only those of them who refused to communicate with Gentile Christians. With respect to the rest, he says, that he should have no objection to hold in communion with them. (Dial. p. 231). He describes them as persons who observed the Law of Moses, but did not impose it upon others. Who could these be but Jewish Unitarians? For according to the evidence of all antiquity, and what is *supposed* by Justin himself, all the Jewish Christians were such. It is probable, therefore, that the Nazarenes or Ebionites were considered as in a state of excommunication, merely because they would have imposed the Law of Moses upon the Gentiles, and refused to hold communion with any, besides those who were circumcised; so that, in fact, they excommunicated themselves³.”

In answer to this, it is sufficient to give a brief account of that part of the Dialogue from which these inferences have been drawn.

³ History of early Opinions, Vol. III. p. 201.

Trypho asks Justin¹ whether, if a Jew were to be so far converted to Christianity, as to admit Jesus to be the Christ of God, but to retain the Mosaic ritual, he might hope for salvation. Justin gives his opinion, that, if a Christian of such a description were neither to attempt the imposition of the same burden on others, nor avoid the communion of other Christians, he might be saved. Others, however, he observes, were not so charitable; and, with respect to the historical facts, whether all or a great part of the Christians of Jewish extraction either retained the observance of the Mosaic law, or were Unitarians, he has made no declaration or intimation of any sort.

Though Justin's evidence is wanting, it is, notwithstanding, highly probable that the Christians of Samaria and Judæa, who had fallen under his observation, before his conversion to Christianity and journey to Rome, were, for the most part, followers of the Law of Moses. They would be the objects of his notice, a few years before the destruction of Jerusalem, and the dispersion of the Jews under Adrian; and *till that time* we know, on other authority², that the church of Jerusalem joined the observance of the Law of Moses with the religion of Christ.

The general opinion respecting the debasement of the Christian religion, by an intermixture with Judaism, will explain the passage in Justin's first Apology; in which he mentions that he had noticed

¹ P. 230, and seq.

² Eusebius and Sulpicius Severus.

more and *truer* Christians from among the Gentiles than from among the Jews and Samaritans.

Πλείονάς τε καὶ ἀληθεστέρους τοὺς ἐξ ἐθνῶν τῶν ἀπὸ Ἰουδαίων καὶ Σαμαρέων Χριστιανούς εἰδότες³.

Here closes the testimony of Justin. A reader of this Father must be surprised at finding it affirmed, by a modern writer, that all or the greater part of the Jewish Christians, either of his own age, or before it, are either declared or “supposed” by him to be Unitarians.

³ Page 78.

CHAPTER IX.

THE INTERPRETATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT, BY THE FIRST JEWISH CHRISTIANS, COLLECTED FROM THEIR RELIGIOUS OPINIONS.

1. Importance of determining the opinions of the primitive church of Jerusalem. The opinions of this Church identified with those of Hegesippus. Hegesippus supposed by Dr Priestley to have been an Ebionitish Unitarian. 2. This opinion refuted by Lardner. 3. Reasons assigned for supposing Hegesippus an Unitarian. 4. Examination of these reasons. 5. Whether Eusebius would speak favourably of an Ebionite. Positive testimony of Eusebius to the religious opinions of Hegesippus. Hegesippus proved by this testimony to have been a believer in the Divinity of Christ. 6. Testimony of Hegesippus to the purity of the faith of the church of Jerusalem.

I. IN examining the opinions of the first Hebrew Christians, our inquiries are naturally directed to the church of Jerusalem; because it was founded before any other, and because it was the only church which entirely or principally consisted, for any length of time, of Jews only. All the others were soon composed, *for the most part*, of Gentiles; and in them, after the first struggle about the obligation of the Law of Moses had ceased, *all distinction* seems to have been at an end. The Jew seems to have been soon lost in them by a complete assimilation of himself to the Gentilism of Christianity; or rejected from them by excommunication.

The great attachment of the Christians of Jerusalem to the Law of Moses is first mentioned in the New Testament¹; and, from the testimony of two

¹ Acts xxi. 20.

ecclesiastical historians, it is known to have continued till the dissolution of their church, under Adrian. From the same respectable authority, by which we know that these Christians remained a full century in the profession of Judaism, we are informed also that they were believers in the Divinity of Christ.

Eusebius and Sulpicius Severus are the only writers of antiquity, in whose works the religious tenets of the *primitive* church of Jerusalem are expressly mentioned. The former has happily preserved a few fragments of Hegesippus, the first Christian *historian*, after the writers of the New Testament; in which, while relating some particulars of the Christians of Jerusalem, he takes occasion to mention, that the church continued a virgin, or free from heresy, till the death of James the Just, at the end of the first, or the beginning of the second century. The opinions, therefore, of the first Hebrew Christians are identified² with those of Hegesippus: what he conceived to be the purity of the Christian faith was, by his testimony, the faith of his Jewish brethren. On this account, to ascertain with certainty the religious opinions of this ancient historian, is a matter of considerable importance.

² The opinions of other Churches are also identified with those of Hegesippus, and hence he has been brought forward by Dr Priestley as a voucher for the prevalence of Unitarianism in those churches. "He moreover says, that in travelling to Rome, where he arrived in the time of Anicetus, he found all the churches that he visited held the faith, which had been taught by Christ and the Apostles, which, *in his opinion*, was probably that of Christ being not God, but man only." History of early Opinions, Vol. IV. p. 308.

The Ebionitism of this historian, and consequently his testimony to the pure Unitarianism of the ancient Christians of Jerusalem, is a notion of a very late date. The reasons lately assigned for this supposition would be too trifling to require the slightest notice, were they to rest on their own merits, instead of the authority of their patrons. And even this consideration will not entitle most of them to more than a summary answer.

II. It may first be noticed, that the writer, who has lately attempted to prove Hegesippus an Ebionite, has also maintained, that only one sort of Ebionites existed in his age¹; those who disbelieved the miraculous conception and Divinity of Christ, and whose Gospel was without the first two chapters of St Matthew.

Were this all that we had to refute—were it only necessary to prove, that Hegesippus was not one of those Ebionites, who denied the miraculous conception, and rejected the first two chapters of St Matthew, Dr Lardner would decide on this subject.

“The next fragment of this writer contains an account of Domitian’s inquiry after the posterity of David. *At that time*, says he, *there were yet remaining of the kindred of Christ, the grandsons of*

¹ Dr Priestley supposes that all the Hebrew Christians disbelieved the miraculous conception till after the age of Irenæus, A.D. 170. “Originally the Jewish Christians did not believe the doctrine of the miraculous conception. Both Justin Martyr and Irenæus represent them as disbelieving it, without excepting any that did.” *History of early Opinions*, Vol. III. p. 215.

Jude, who was called his brother according to the flesh. These some accused as being of the race of David; and Evocatus brought them before Domitianus Cæsar. For he too was afraid of the coming of Christ as well as Herod². . . . This passage deserves to be remarked. It contains a reference to the history in the second chapter of St Matthew; and shows plainly that this part of St Matthew's gospel was owned by this Hebrew Christian. But, Epiphanius informs us, that the gospel of the Ebionites begins thus: *It came to pass, in the days of Herod the king of Judæa, that John came baptizing with the baptism of repentance in the river Jordan:* which is the beginning of the third chapter a little altered, and he there says expressly, that their gospel, called according to St Matthew, *is defective and corrupted*. It is plain from this passage, that Hegesippus received the history in the second chapter of St Matthew; so that he used our Greek gospel. Or, if he used only the Hebrew edition of St Matthew's gospel, this history must have been in it³."

III. The first reason assigned for supposing Hegesippus an Ebionite is, that he has given "a list of *all* the heresies of his time; in which he enumerates a considerable number, and all of them Gnostics, without making any mention of the Ebionites;" though they were at that very time in full vigour⁴.

² Matt. ii.

³ Lardner on Hegesippus, Vol. ii. p. 140. ed. Kippis.

⁴ History of early Opinions, Vol. iii. p. 222. "Hegesippus, the first Christian historian, himself a Jew, and therefore probably an Ebionite,

1. "It is remarkable that Hegesippus, in giving an account of the heresies of his time, though he mentions the Carpocratians, Valentinians and others, who were generally termed Gnostics (and who held that Christ had a pre-existence and was man only in appearance) not only makes no mention of this supposed heresy of the Nazarenes or Ebionites, but says, that in his travels to Rome, where he spent some time with Anicetus, and visited the bishops of other sees, he found that they all held the same doctrine that was taught in the law, by the prophets, and by our Lord. What could this be but the proper Unitarian doctrine held by the Jews, and which he himself had been taught¹?"

2. Eusebius is stated to be *silent* respecting the tenets of Hegesippus; ("That Eusebius doth not expressly say what this faith was, is no wonder, considering his prejudice against the Unitarians of his own time²;") and not to have quoted him, among other ancient authorities, against those who held the opinion of the simple humanity of Christ³.

3. It is stated that Hegesippus has quoted the gospel according to the Hebrews, and in the Hebrew tongue:—"Shewing, as Eusebius observes, that he was one of the Hebrew Christians. We may therefore conclude that he quoted it with respect: and

Ebionite, enumerating *the* heresies of his time, mentions several of the Gnostic kind, but *not that of Christ being a mere man.*" Letters to Dr Horsley, Part i. p. 144.

¹ History of Corruptions, Vol. i. p. 8. ² Vol. i. p. 8.

³ History of early Opinions, Vol. III. p. 227.

this was not done, except by those who were Ebionites, or who favoured their opinions⁴.”

4. “Had there been any pretence for quoting Hegesippus as a maintainer of the Divinity of Christ, he would certainly have been mentioned in preference to Justin Martyr, or any others in the list (‘of the ancient writer in Eusebius’); not only because he was an earlier writer, but chiefly because he was one of the Jewish Christians, who are well known not to have favoured that opinion⁵.”

5. Hegesippus has related, that James the Just uttered this exclamation: “Why do you ask me concerning Jesus the son of man⁶?”

6. Valesius, a learned commentator on Eusebius, has intimated a suspicion, that the works of Hegesippus were neglected and lost on account of the errors in them:—“Ob errores quibus scatebant⁷.”

IV. How extremely trivial these reasons are, were we even to admit all the facts on which they are founded, must be obvious to the commonest reader.

The “errores” of Valesius are probably only historical blunders, instead of heretical errors; and were we to admit *him* to decide on the opinions of Hegesippus, Hegesippus was a Trinitarian. An expression in a fragment of this Historian, preserved in Eusebius, ἡ θύρα τοῦ Ἰησοῦ, is explained by Valesius

⁴ History of early Opinions, Vol. III. p. 228.

⁵ Ib. p. 228.

⁶ P. 229.—Euseb. Hist. L. II. c. xxiii.

⁷ P. 229.—Valesii Annot. in Euseb. L. V. c. xi.

to mean *Fides in Patrem et Filium et Spiritum Sanctum*¹.

“*Son of man*” is used in Scripture as one of the appellations of the Messiah: the great object of Dr Priestley’s history is to demonstrate, that the simple humanity of Christ is taught in Scripture: but, when he previously supposes any one of its expressions to imply this doctrine, he takes for granted all that he proposes to prove.

The fourth reason, not to mention that it is trivial, is partly founded on a mistake of Eusebius copied by Jerom, which Eusebius himself corrected in another part of his History. Justin lived about A.D. 140: Hegesippus A.D. 160 or 170, as Valesius, Lardner, and Cave have shown².

From the narrative of Eusebius it cannot be inferred, whether Hegesippus quoted the gospel of the Hebrews with respect or not: much less can we discover that he acknowledged its authority. “Let this passage,” says Lardner, “be ever so obscure; I think it affords proof, that there was a Hebrew gospel in the time of Hegesippus, and that he made use of it; but *how far* we cannot say³.”

The first and principal reason assigned for the Ebionitism of Hegesippus, is founded on the misstatement of an historical fact. He never professed to give a catalogue of *all* the heresies of his time: it can only be inferred from Eusebius that he had

¹ History Ecc. L. II. c. xxiii.

² Valesius on Euseb. L. IV. c. viii. and L. II. c. xxiii. and Lardner and Cave on Hegesippus.

³ Lardner on Hegesippus, Vol. II. p. 144.

left an account of the "original stocks" from which the heresies of his time had ramified, τῶν κατ' αὐτὸν αἰρέσεων τὰς ἀρχάς⁴. He has only mentioned eleven heresies, one of which is that of the Carpocratians. Irenæus, his contemporary, has mentioned the names of fifteen, observing, at the same time, that there were many others⁵; and this, before he came to the different sects of the Valentinians, against whom he professedly wrote.

Hegesippus has only given an account of the *origin* of Unitarianism, without specifying each of the sects, of his time, which professed it. The appendix to Tertullian's Præscription is, in this case, an appendix also to Hegesippus. The writer is supposed by Pagi to have been of Tertullian's age; and Dr Priestley observes, "The appendix is probably as good an authority as that of Eusebius⁶." In this work also, Carpocrates is mentioned as the first Unitarian: and "after him Cerinthus arose teaching similar doctrines; and his successor was Ebion, not agreeing in every respect with Cerinthus⁷."

Hegesippus wrote a slight, and perhaps inaccurate sketch of the *origin* of heresies, and in them of Unitarianism in particular: others have followed him, and traced them further. Some have made

⁴ History, L. iv. c. xxii.

⁵ "Ab his autem, qui prædicti sunt, jam multæ propagines multarum hæresium factæ sunt." Irenæus, L. i. c. xxviii.

⁶ History of early Opinions, Vol. III. p. 304.

⁷ "Post hunc (i. e. Carpocratem) Cerinthus hæreticus erupit, similia docens.....et hujus successor Ebion fuit Cerintho non in omni parte consentiens." [Tertull. Op. p. 252. ed. Rigalt. 1634.]

Carpocrates the first Unitarian, others have placed Cerinthus before him. Hegesippus was probably one of the first class of these ancient historians.

To show that Hegesippus did not consider Unitarians as heretics, and thence to infer that he was one himself, a very whimsical fiction has been brought into action. By some inadvertence or other, it has been actually taken for granted, that the Carpocratians, one of his heretical sects, were believers in the simple *Divinity*¹ of Christ, instead of the simple humanity². "Though he mentions the Carpocratians, Valentinians, and others, who were generally termed Gnostics (and who held that Christ had a pre-existence, and was man only in appearance) he not only makes no mention of this supposed heresy of the Nazarenes," &c. This is one of the most incredible mistakes that ever was committed.

In order to prove Hegesippus an Unitarian, it was also necessary to suppose that Eusebius is silent respecting his tenets. And the passages in which he *has expressly written* on the tenets of this ancient Historian have been unaccountably overlooked. It is necessary, however, to attend to the real testimony

¹ "Hegesippus the first Christian historian, enumerating the heresies of his time, mentions several of the Gnostic kind, but *not that of Christ being a mere man.*" History of early Opinions, Vol. iv. p. 307.

² "Carpocrates præterea hanc tulit sectam. Unam esse dicit virtutem.....Christum non ex virgine Mariâ natum, sed ex semine Joseph, *hominem tantummodo* genitum. Appendix ad Tertull. Præscrip. adv. Hæret. Carpocrates autem, et qui ab eo, dicunt Jesum e Joseph natum, et cum similis reliquis hominibus fuerit, &c." Irenæus, L. i. c. xxiv.

of Eusebius, instead of deducing preposterous conclusions from his fictitious silence.

V. To see the full force of the testimony of Eusebius, it will be proper to keep in view the general spirit of the ruling members of the Christian church against Unitarianism in his age. Theodotus, one of the first Unitarians among Gentile Christians, was excommunicated by Victor at the end of the second century³. Paul of Samosata, one of the few believers in the simple humanity of Christ in the third century, was deposed from his bishopric⁴. Marcellus of Ancyra, if Eusebius may be credited, had, in his time, formed an incongruous mixture of two different systems of Unitarianism—Sabellianism, and the faith of Paul of Samosata⁵. Eusebius wrote a treatise against him, which is still extant; and his religious opinions formed the principal ground of the persecution which he suffered for many years.

Had Eusebius been disposed to speak highly of any Unitarian Christian, the spirit of the times would have prevented him; especially, if it be true, that, "though a learned man, he was not of the firmest tone of mind⁶." Had Hegesippus, while treating on the subject of the first Christians of Jerusalem, related that the church continued in the virgin purity of Ebionitism till the end of the first century, and that all the churches which he had

³ Eusebius, *Ecc. History*, L. v. c. xxi.

⁴ L. vii. c. xxix. xxx.

⁵ Eusebius *cont. Marcellum*, L. iii. c. vi.

⁶ *History of early Opinions*, Vol. III. p. 316.

visited held the same doctrine—Eusebius would have been prevented, by prudential reasons, from commending a writer, and citing his words, after he had published such a relation.

If the prevailing bias and temper of mind of Eusebius be considered, it is as unlikely that he should be disposed to launch out into praises of an Ebionite, or Unitarian of any class, as that he could suppose his contemporaries would endure to hear them. It cannot be supposed that “he who speaks of Ebionites with hatred and contempt¹,” should pronounce an unnecessary encomium on an Ebionitish writer. “That Eusebius should take so violent a part, as he always does, against the ancient Unitarians, is not difficult to be accounted for².” “With what rancour does Eusebius treat this class of Christians both in his history and in his treatise against Marcellus of Ancyra³!” These observations are perfectly just; and conformably to their spirit, we may venture to declare it impossible, that he should zealously take the part of any ancient Unitarian. Eusebius, however, has not simply spoken of Hegesippus “with respect,” and been silent about his tenets, as has lately been stated: he has borne the fullest testimony to his orthodoxy; and has assigned him a distinguished place among a class of writers, who are the subject of his panegyric.

In the seventh and eighth chapters of the fourth book of his History, after having mentioned that the

¹ History of early Opinions, Vol. III. p. 222.

² Vol. III. p. 316.

³ Page 237.

reputation of the Christian church suffered severely in the second century, by the misconduct of the sectaries, and of one sect in particular, which had disgraced the profession of Unitarianism⁴—he observes, that in time the truth cleared itself, and shone brighter after its temporary obscurity; the sects split into parts of various sorts, and their old opinions died away, or were lost in new ones; the calumny became confined to those sects, to which it properly belonged; “the splendour of the Catholic and only true church was magnified;” and the superiority of its doctrines became universally acknowledged. He then immediately observes—“Truth brought forward many champions for its own cause, who contended, against the impious sects, in debates and writings. *Among these Hegesippus was distinguished*.” from whose works, he continues to observe, he has largely drawn materials.

In the twenty-first chapter of the same book he says—“At this time flourished *in the church* (the Ebionites were not then members of the church) Hegesippus, Dionysius, Pinytus: and after these

⁴ Carpocratians.

⁵ Προήει δ' εἰς αὐξήσιν καὶ μέγεθος ἡ τῆς καθόλου καὶ μόνης ἀληθοῦς ἐκκλησίας λαμπρότης. P. 149. ed. Reading.

Ἐμενε δὲ μόνῃ ἄρα παρὰ πᾶσι κρατοῦσα καὶ ἀνομολογουμένη τὰ μάλιστα διαπρέπειν ἐπὶ σεμνότητι καὶ σωφροσύνῃ, θείοις τε καὶ φιλοσόφοις δόγμασιν, ἢ καθ' ἡμᾶς διδασκαλία. P. 150.

Παρήγεν εἰς μέσον ἡ ἀλήθεια πλείους ἐαυτῆς ὑπερμάχους, οὐ δι' ἀγράφων αὐτὸ μόνον ἐλέγχων, ἀλλὰ καὶ δι' ἐγγράφων ἀποδείξεων, κατὰ τῶν ἀθέων αἵρέσεων στρατενομένων. Ibid.

Ἐν τούτοις ἐγνωρίζετο Ἡγήσιππος. Ibid.

Philippus, Apollinarius, and Melito: Musanus also and Modestus, and last of all Irenæus: the orthodoxy of whose sound faith of the Apostolic tradition has come down to us in their writings:”—ὧν καὶ εἰς ἡμᾶς τῆς Ἀποστολικῆς παραδόσεως ἢ τῆς ὑγιоῦς πίστεως ἔγγραφος κατηλθεν ὀρθοδοξία.

It was not from any thing ambiguous or obscure in the writings of Hegesippus, that Eusebius collected his religious opinions. His sentiments were shown by the most unequivocal marks. For, in continuation of the last sentence, Eusebius observes—“Hegesippus, indeed, in the five books of memoirs which have come to us, has left the *fullest testimony* of his own sentiments.”

Ὁ μὲν οὖν Ἡγήσιππος ἐν πέντε τοῖς εἰς ἡμᾶς ἐλθοῦσιν ὑπομνήμασι, τῆς ἰδίας γνώμης πληρεστάτην μνήμην καταλέλοιπεν. c. xxii.

This evidence has been entirely overlooked, by those who have maintained that Eusebius is silent on the subject of the religious opinions of Hegesippus; and who have concluded, with unparalleled extravagance, in defiance of all the ancient testimony on the subject, that both this ancient historian, and the whole church of Jerusalem, before the time of Adrian, were Unitarians.

To render these testimonies complete, it is only necessary to recollect what were the known and undoubted opinions of some of the illustrious persons, with whom Hegesippus is classed, on the subject of the nature of Christ; or, what combination of opinions formed the system of the Catholic church.

Many of them are known only by the encomiums of Eusebius, and of an anonymous writer cited in one part of his history. The tenets of Irenæus are known from his works: and it is hardly necessary to observe, that he was a sincere believer in the Divinity of Christ. The sentiments of Melito are also known to have been the same with those of Irenæus, by the testimony of an ancient writer cited by Eusebius¹.

When Eusebius wrote these testimonies to the character of Hegesippus, the Nicene creed, (to which he had subscribed, though not without some scruples,) represented the leading doctrines of the church, which, he observes, had always been the same². I purposely avoid the everlasting dispute, whether he himself leaned towards Arianism or not: on this head, Du Pin and Lardner, two able and candid judges, may be consulted. However Eusebius may have differed from his brethren in some points, most of which will probably be thought very unimportant, he uniformly and zealously contended for the Divinity and pre-existence of Christ, and his eternal generation from the Father. But, it is only necessary to observe at present, that what he considered as the church (ἐκκλησία) and its orthodoxy were directly opposite to Unitarianism. He frequently quotes the authority of the church, against Marcellus of Ancyra³; and, in his history, speaking of a writer, whom he

¹ Eccl. History, L. v. c. xxviii.

² Ἀεὶ κατὰ τὰ αὐτὰ καὶ ὁσαύτως ἔχουσα, ἡ τῆς καθόλου καὶ μόνης ἀληθοῦς ἐκκλησίας λαμπρότης. Hist. Ec. L. iv. c. vii. p. 149.

³ Euseb. cont. Marcell. L. i. c. iii. vi. vii. viii. L. ii. c. vi. vii. 23. L. iii. c. 6.

classes among those, to whom he annexed the epithets ὀρθοδόξων καὶ ἐκκλησιαστικῶν, he observes, that this author wrote a book against the celebrated Unitarian Artemo¹.

Upon the whole: Eusebius, a Bishop of the Catholic church—a believer in the Divinity and pre-existence of Christ, in an age extremely intolerant towards Unitarianism—not of a firm tone of mind, as some say, and therefore not disposed to shock prevailing opinions—not without a considerable portion of bitterness against Unitarians, and therefore not inclined to praise an Ebionite—an accomplished and critical scholar, well acquainted with mankind, and on these accounts incapable of inserting in his history a *well-known falsehood*—has related, that Hegesippus, Melito, Irenæus, and others, flourished *in the church*, the opinions of which he has in other places opposed to Unitarianism, and that their writings contained orthodox opinions agreeable to the Apostolic tradition and the true faith. He has also related that Hegesippus was distinguished as a champion of the church against the errors of sectaries, and particularly against the extravagancies of the Carpocratians, who were Unitarians. The abstract term ὀρθοδοξία, by which he has characterized the opinions of Hegesippus, he has afterwards applied in concrete to a body of writers, one of whom wrote against the Unitarianism of Artemo. He has commended the faith and zeal of Hegesippus; he has drawn materials from his writings, and ranked him among the most

¹ L. v. c. xxvii. xxviii.

distinguished members of the church in the second century. Stronger testimony to the opinions of any writer is not often found in the works of another.

It is not easy to conceive how any author should commit so many oversights as to be led to suppose Hegesippus an Ebionite. He is expressly declared to have been a member of the church, at a time when the Ebionites and Nazarenes were neither members of the church of Jerusalem, nor of any other. And "Eusebius² relates, that he cited the Proverbs of Solomon, by a title which implied his acknowledgement of the book: whereas the Ebionites," according to Epiphanius, "acknowledged no part of the Old Testament but the Pentateuch, nor the whole of that³."

VI. Hegesippus then, a Hebrew Christian, a believer in the Divinity of Christ, born at the end of the first century or in the beginning of the second, before the extinction of the Hebrew church of Jerusalem, with some of the members of which he was probably acquainted, has borne testimony to the purity of the Christian faith before the time of Trajan, in the most pointed language: and, as his testimony was given while writing on the subject of the church of Jerusalem, he must be considered as a more immediate voucher for the purity of the faith of that church⁴. Tertullian, Eusebius, and many others have

² Eccl. History, L. iv. c. xxii.

³ Horsley's Letters to Priestley, p. 71. [Letter ix. p. 190. ed. 1812.]

⁴ Valesius is of opinion that Hegesippus spoke of the church of Jerusalem only. See his note on Euseb. Hist. L. iii. c. xxxii. The criticism

declared, in general terms, that the Catholic faith was more ancient than that of the sectaries. Clemens Alexandrinus, Cyprian, and Chrysostom, who considered Unitarians as heretics, have declared, with Hegesippus, that the first age of Christianity was clear from heresy¹. But, when these writers were speaking of the church in general, they might possibly forget the individual church of Jerusalem: on this account, as well as because they were after the time of Hegesippus, their evidence is not of equal authority with his: their collateral testimony must, however, be allowed to bring with it some confirmation of the truth of his relation.

The modern writers, who have supposed Hegesippus an Unitarian, have rather over-rated his authority, when they thought it would help their own system: it will not be undervalued, it is to be hoped, when he is proved to have been a believer in the Divinity of Christ. He has related, with the simplicity which is said to have marked his character, that—till Symeon was made Bishop of Jerusalem (i. e. till the time of Trajan)—“they used to call the church the virgin church: for it had not yet been corrupted with vain doctrines².”

criticism of the historian is, in this case, to be followed in preference to that of his very learned and judicious commentator. Some of the sects, which Hegesippus has mentioned, were not Jewish.

¹ “Quæ intelligenda sunt de apertiore fallacis doctrinæ sparsione, majoreque numero pravorum doctorum et vehementiore conatu: nam a tempore quo scriptæ sunt altera Petri, item Epistolæ Judæ et Joannis, jam fraudes illæ eruperant.” Le Clerc.

² Διὰ τοῦτο ἐκάλουν τὴν ἐκκλησίαν παρθένον· οὐπω γὰρ ἔφθαρτο ἀκοαῖς ματαίαις. Eusebius, L. iv. c. xxii. p. 182.

This testimony and that of Clemens Alexandrinus were probably never meant to be taken in a strict literal sense, as Spanheim, Jones and Le Clerc have observed. "This could not be strictly true, because there were Gnostics in the time of the Apostles; but they were few compared with their numbers afterwards. On this account, it is said by several of the ancients that heresy began in the time of Adrian; when the most distinguished of the Gnostics made their appearance³." Had the entire works of Hegesippus come down to us, we should probably have found, that he had explained this testimony in the same manner: for the explanation of Eusebius⁴ is exactly the same in substance with that of the modern writers, which I have mentioned; and Hegesippus has named heresies (the Simonians and others) which he knew existed in the time of the Apostles.

After due deductions for a loose, popular phrase, or even for wilful exaggeration, if it be thought necessary, it must be in the highest degree probable, from the testimony of Hegesippus, that the great body of the church of Jerusalem believed in the Divinity of Christ. After reasonable allowances for inaccuracy or exaggeration, an impartial judge will be disposed to express his opinion, formed on the evidence of Hegesippus, in the language of another ancient writer on the same subject:—" *Pene omnes Christum Deum credebant*⁵."

³ History of early Opinions, Vol. III. p. 261.

⁴ Hist. L. III. c. xxxii.

⁵ Sulpicius Severus.

CHAPTER X.

THE INTERPRETATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT, BY THE FIRST
JEWISH CHRISTIANS, COLLECTED FROM THEIR RELIGIOUS OPINIONS.

1. Testimony of Eusebius to the priority of the opinions of the church. Claim of Marcellus to the priority of his opinions. Claim of the Artemonite Unitarians to the priority of their opinions. Refutation of these claims. Inconsistent with one another. Refuted as soon as they were advanced by Caius and Eusebius. 2. Credibility of the testimony of Eusebius on the subject of the primitive church of Jerusalem. Appeal to his testimony and that of Sulpicius Severus on the subject of the Jewish Christians by Dr Priestley. Eusebius not disposed to speak highly in favour of Ebionites. His testimony to the faith of the primitive church of Jerusalem. 3. Testimony of Sulpicius Severus. 4. Collateral Testimony of other writers, Eusebius, Theodoret, Epiphanius, The author of the Alexandrian Chronicle. The origin of the Ebionites universally allowed to have been at the end of the first or the beginning of the second century. 5. Summary view of the evidence to prove that the primitive church of Jerusalem believed in the Divinity of Christ.

1. EUSEBIUS, a native of Palestine, born about A.D. 265, has left the most ample testimony to the priority of the opinions entertained by the church in his time, and to the purity of the faith of the Hebrew church of Jerusalem in particular.

It has lately been contended, that Unitarianism was the religion of the common people among the Gentile Christians in the second and third centuries. The nature of the claims of the few Unitarians among the Gentile Christians, who existed at intervals in those ages, is, in itself, a sufficient refutation of this opinion. In their disputes with the members of the church, instead of appealing to the faith of

the great body of Christians of their time, they stepped back out of sight into antiquity, and boldly asserted that theirs *had been* the prevailing religion, at the time to which they referred.

Marcellus of Ancyra, in the age of Eusebius, never thought of contending for the general prevalence of his opinions *in his own time*, but affirmed that Unitarianism was the common religion till the time of Origen¹. The Unitarians in the time of Origen (the Artemonites about A.D. 220) instead of assuming with Marcellus that Unitarianism was *then* the religion of the majority, insisted that *it had prevailed* universally till the time of Victor².

These bold pretensions, thrown out by these persons at random, without the slightest knowledge of the history of the times, on which they presumed to speak, were refuted by Eusebius in the manner that might be expected from a learned and critical historian.

When Marcellus asserted, that the doctrines of the church of his time were no older than the days of Origen, and that his system of Unitarianism had prevailed before—Eusebius immediately appealed to the acts of the Synods before Origen's age, in which the Divinity of Christ was universally maintained, without any exception whatever³.

¹ Eusebius contra Marcellum, L. i. c. iv.

² Euseb. Hist. L. v. c. xxviii.

³ Ἐγὼ δὲ καὶ Ὀριγένους παλαιότερων ἀνδρῶν, πλείστοις ὅσοις Ἐκκλησιαστικοῖς συγγράμμασιν ἐντετύχηκα, Ἐπισκόπων τε καὶ Συνόδων ἐπιστολαῖς διαφόροις, πρόπαλαι γραφεύσαις, δι' ὧν εἰς καὶ αὐτός

With respect to the pretensions of the Artemonites, he observes, that they had been refuted by a writer, whom he has cited, supposed to be either Caius or Origen. They had ignorantly asserted, that all the ancient Christians till after the time of Victor, together with the Apostles themselves, were Unitarians. A brief answer was sufficient to refute so preposterous a claim. Accordingly, this writer immediately produced the names of Justin, Miltiades, Tatian and Clement, before the time of Victor's successor; observing that the Divinity of Christ also was taught in the writings of many others. And he insultingly asks, "Who is ignorant of the books of Irenæus and Melito, and the rest, teaching that Christ is God and Man?" One of the first religious services, performed by the Christians, consisted in singing psalms and hymns to their God and Saviour: this writer, in answer to the Unitarians of his time, appealed to these hymns written in the first age of Christianity, in which the learned and the ignorant joined, and in which Christ was celebrated as the Word of God. *Ψαλμοὶ δὲ ὅσοι καὶ ᾠδαὶ ἀδελφῶν ἀπαρχῆς ὑπὸ πιστῶν γραφεῖσαι τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ τὸν Χριστὸν ὑμνοῦσι θεολογοῦντες*¹. That he has not misrepresented the meaning of those ancient hymns, or given only an account of supposititious ones, instead of the genuine productions of the first century, we know from the testimony of Pliny; who in his letter to Trajan

αὐτὸς ὁ τῆς πίστεως χαρακτὴρ ἀποδείκνυται. *Contra Marcellum*, L. i. c. iv. p. 20. ed. Viger. 1628.

¹ Eusebius *Hist. Eccl.* L. v. c. xxviii. p. 252.

(A. D. 110) mentions the custom of the Christians to sing hymns to Christ as God, or as *a* God². What Pliny relates as an existing custom in the year 110, or as others say, 104, must have taken place at a still earlier period: and his testimony, united to that of Caius or Origen, would of themselves be almost sufficient to enable us to decide on this article of the primitive Christian faith. But this discussion belongs properly to another place. It is necessary to return to the church of Jerusalem.

II. Eusebius has not only borne testimony to the priority of the opinions of the Christian churches in general of his time, and this on the authority of the acts of the churches themselves: he had also laboured to gain information on the subject of the *Hebrew* church of Jerusalem in particular, before its extinction under Adrian. When it is recollected that he was a native of Palestine, that he collected the opinions of the church of Jerusalem less than two centuries after Adrian's time, that besides the *entire* works of Hegesippus and Aristo of Pella, he had probably an opportunity of drawing information from a multitude of other books, whose very names are now lost, and perhaps from the records of the church of Jerusalem itself: when it is considered, that he professes to give his testimony on the authority of ancient records, at a time when their exist-

² "Adfirmabant autem, hanc fuisse summam vel culpæ suæ, vel erroris, quod essent soliti stato die ante lucem convenire, carmenque Christo quasi Deo dicere secum invicem." L. x. Epist. 97.

ence would afford the easy means of convicting him of a falsehood; his evidence is of great weight indeed.

Dr Priestley has sometimes, with great propriety, insisted strongly on the superior authority of Eusebius and Sulpicius Severus, on the very subject of the Hebrew church of Jerusalem and other Jewish Christians. "If any *regard* is to be paid to Eusebius, the oldest historian, or to Sulpicius, who is much more circumstantial than Orosius, and on that account better entitled to credit, no Jews, Christians, or others, were allowed to remain in the place¹." Eusebius² says that the first heralds of our Saviour, (πρωτοκήρυκες) by whom he must have meant the Apostles, called those Ebionites, which in the Hebrew language signifies poor, who, not denying the body of Christ, shewed their folly in denying his Divinity³."

This might seem to imply an admission of this ancient historian's authority. Yet we find in another place: "As to the general testimony of Eusebius and other writers, themselves believers in the Divinity of Christ, that the church of Jerusalem towards the close of the Apostolic age was orthodox in their sense of the word, *it is not to be regarded*, unless they bring some sufficient *proof* of their assertion. They were, no doubt, willing to have it thought so; and without considering it very par-

¹ Letters to the Archdeacon of St Alban's, Part III. p. 12.

² Eccl. Theol. L. i. c. xiv. p. 75.

³ History of early Opinions, Vol. III. p. 162.

ticularly, *might presume* that it was so: but the facts, which they themselves record, and the account which they give of the conduct of the Apostles in divulging this doctrine to the Jews, make it highly improbable that the case should have been, as in general terms they assert⁴."

The *proofs* of an *historian*, when he treats of times before his own, seldom consist in artificial reasoning, but, in an appeal to the authentic records of those times. In the two passages just referred to in this historian, containing the mention of facts, the truth of which Dr Priestley admits without scruple, he has not mentioned on what authority he wrote: whether he related them on the authority of ancient records, or tradition, or mere conjecture, he has not said. On the subject of the faith of the church of Jerusalem he expressly declares that he speaks on the authority of written documents. Yet Dr Priestley, resting on the character of the historian, has not withheld his assent to the two first-mentioned testimonies; but affirms, that the last "is not to be regarded⁵."

⁴ Letters to Dr Horsley, Part 1. p. 23.

⁵ "With respect to the suffrage of Eusebius to the orthodoxy of the primitive church, and particularly of the bishops of Jerusalem towards the close of the Apostolic age; a suffrage so full and explicit that it hath been deemed a decisive argument against Dr Priestley's hypothesis: with respect to this testimony, we say, the Doctor could only find one way of getting rid of it. *It is not*, says he, *to be regarded*. What a prodigious advantage this short and compendious method of decision gives a man over his opponent. It saves all the needless expence of criticism. It serves instead of a thousand arguments; and it hath the singular felicity of being sheltered from all reply." *Monthly Review* for January, 1784, p. 59.

Let it, however, be supposed, that the prejudices of Eusebius on this subject might destroy his veracity. What must have been the consequence? In his age, Judaizing Christians were universally despised and hated by their Gentile brethren: according to Jerom's account, the Ebionites and Cerinthians had been long since anathematized for their attachment to the ritual law only¹. The Ebionites were distinguished from other Christians by two leading marks—their observance of the Mosaic ritual, and the profession of Unitarianism. Had Eusebius really been more influenced by prejudice than by a regard for truth, on finding that the members of the church of Jerusalem had not emerged from Judaism before the time of Adrian, he would probably have set them down at once as Ebionites, without any further inquiry: and had he actually found, that they were both Judaizers and Unitarians, he, “who speaks of Ebionites with hatred and contempt,” would not have been disposed to vouch for the purity of their faith; nor would he have dared to publish the following Testimony:—

“B. IV. CHAP. V.

“THE BISHOPS OF JERUSALEM, FROM OUR SAVIOUR TO THOSE TIMES.” (I. E. TIME OF ADRIAN.)

“I have not found any written account preserved of the times which the Bishops in Jerusalem presided: for the account is that they were very short-lived. So much I have collected from *written records*, that till the siege of the Jews under Adrian, fifteen suc-

¹ Hieron. Augustino Epistola, LXXXIX. Vol. I. p. 634.

cessive Bishops lived there, all whom *they declare* to have been Hebrews, and to have received the faith of Christ in its genuine purity; so as to have been esteemed worthy of the Episcopal ministry by those who were capable of judging on such matters².”

The meaning of the term *γνώσις* is very inadequately expressed by the word “faith.” The early Christian writers distinguished between *πίστις* faith, and *γνώσις* perfect Christian knowledge³. The first they held to be a summary knowledge of the most necessary truths; which they supposed all true members of the Christian church to possess: the second implied the purity and perfection of Christian faith joined to perfect knowledge⁴, which they supposed to be the lot of only a few.

Eusebius mentions, in the same Chapter, that all these Bishops were of the circumcision. “The Bishops,” it has lately been observed, “were Jews,

Κ Ε Φ. Ε.

² Οἱ ἀνέκαθεν ἀπὸ τοῦ Σωτῆρος καὶ ἐπὶ τοὺς δηλουμένους Ἱεροσολύμων Ἐπίσκοποι.

Τῶν γε μὴν ἐν Ἱεροσολύμοις Ἐπισκόπων τοὺς χρόνους γραφῇ σωζομένους οὐδαμῶς εὗρον. κομιδῇ γὰρ οὖν βραχυβίους αὐτοὺς λόγος κατέχει γενέσθαι. τοσοῦτον δ' ἐξ ἐγγράφων παρείληφα, ὡς μέχρι τῆς κατὰ Ἀδριανὸν Ἰουδαίων πολιτορκίας πέντε καὶ δέκα τὸν ἀριθμὸν αὐτόθι γεγονάσιν Ἐπισκόπων διαδοχαί· οὓς πάντας Ἑβραίους φασὶν ὄντας ἀνέκαθεν, τὴν γνῶσιν τοῦ Χριστοῦ γνησίως καταδέξασθαι. ὥστ' ἤδη πρὸς τῶν τὰ τοιαύδε ἐπικρίνειν δυνατῶν, καὶ τῆς τῶν Ἐπισκόπων λειτουργίας ἀξίους δοκιμασθῆναι. P. 143.

³ Clemens. Alex. Strom. L. v. sub initio; Euseb. Eccl. Hist. L. II. c. i. Valesius, Note on Eusebius, p. 24.

⁴ Οὐτε ἡ γνῶσις ἄνευ πίστεως, οὐθ' ἡ πίστις ἄνευ γνώσεως...
.....Φαίνεται οὖν ὁ Ἀπόστολος διττὴν καταγγέλλων πίστιν
μᾶλλον

because the people were so¹." And, in the spirit of this just remark, it may be added, the Bishops were true believers, because the people, by whom they were elected, were so.

III. When Sulpicius Severus (about A.D. 400) compiled his history of the first four centuries, he was enabled, like Eusebius, to draw materials from books which are now lost: and the accounts of these two historians, though expressed in different ways, perfectly coincide, and confirm one another. Sulpicius declares, in the most explicit terms, that the great body of the church of Jerusalem believed in the Divinity of Christ:—"Pene omnes Christum Deum sub legis observatione credebant²." The remark of Dr Priestley on this passage will probably be consigned to the fate, to which he would destine the decisive evidence contained in it³. Those, who wish to support a system, by supposing the primitive church of Jerusalem to have been Unitarian, will find it necessary to set aside the relations of Eusebius and Sulpicius Severus: but, an unprejudiced inquirer after truth will attend to them, for this

μᾶλλον δὲ μίαν, αὐξήσιν καὶ τελείωσιν ἐπίδεχομένην· ἡ μὲν γὰρ κοινὴ πίστις καθάπερ θεμέλιος ὑπόκειται. Strom. L. v. pp. 544, 545. ed. Par. 1629.

¹ History of early Opinions, Vol. III. p. 197.

² L. II. c. LXV.

³ "This writer's mere assertion, that the Jewish Christians held Christ to be God, in the proper sense of the word, unsupported by any reasons for it, is even *less to be regarded* than that of Eusebius." Letters to the Archdeacon of St Alban's, Appendix III. p. 218. This is certainly too summary a method of disposing of ancient testimonies.

powerful reason, because they are not simply the only ancient writers of credit, but the only ancient writers of any sort, in whose works any direct testimony on this subject has been preserved.

IV. Though no direct testimony to the orthodoxy of the primitive church of Jerusalem can be produced, in addition to that which I have stated in this and the preceding Chapter, it is remarkably confirmed by a body of collateral evidence, which no less deserves our attention. The two great badges of Ebionitism, I have just observed, were the observance of the Mosaic ritual and an attachment to Unitarianism. That the members of the church of Jerusalem were distinguished by the first of these marks is allowed by all: and if they were also believers in the simple humanity of Christ, they were really and truly Ebionites; and Ebionitism not only began to exist, but flourished, a few days after the crucifixion of Christ, when three thousand Jews were converted to Christianity⁴.

The passage in Eusebius, in which the *first heralds* of our Saviour are said to have given the name of Ebionites to certain Christians, may seem to favour this supposition. And if the hypothesis be true—if that combination of opinions and habits, which constituted Ebionitism, really existed at Jerusalem before the time of Vespasian—Eusebius himself, and several other historians of credit will probably have noticed it, in some parts of their works.

⁴ Acts ii.

But, if no such notice can be found; if, on the contrary, Eusebius himself and other ancient historians of credit have left it on record, that the Ebionites began to exist at the end of the first, or the beginning of the second century; the supposition must be reversed, and we may conclude with certainty, from this indirect testimony, that the members of the primitive church of Jerusalem were not Unitarians.

The general expression “primitive heralds” (πρωτοκήρυκες) in Eusebius, like “primitive Christians,” will not decide on the origin of the Ebionites: it is from other parts of his works that his testimony on the subject of their antiquity is to be collected. In his history, he first treats of them under Trajan, and makes them of the same antiquity with the Cerinthian heresy, and that of the Nicolaitans¹. The author of the Alexandrian Chronicle² also fixes their origin under Trajan, in the year 105. Theodoret, professing to follow Eusebius, places the origin of the Nazaræans, Ebionites and Cerinthians, in the reign of Domitian³. It is not, perhaps, easy to determine whether he misunderstood or forgot Eusebius, or whether he judged this to be the true date, by comparing him with other writers. Irenæus says, that all the heretics were later than the Bishops, to whom the Apostles committed their churches⁴; and, in his catalogue of heresies, he places several sects before the Ebionites⁵. The testimony of Irenæus on this

¹ Eccl. Hist. L. III. c. xxvii. xxviii. xxix.

² Chron. Alex. p. 596.

³ Hæret. Fab. L. II. c. i. ii. iii.

⁴ L. III. c. iv.

⁵ The Heresiarchs Simon, Menander, Saturninus, Basilides, Carpocrates, are placed, by Irenæus and Theodoret, in chronological order before

subject is that of the Christian Fathers in general. "Epiphanius⁶ makes both Ebion (for in his time it was imagined that the Ebionites were so called from some particular person of that name) and Cerinthus contemporary with the Apostle John; and he could not tell which of them was the elder. He likewise makes the Ebionites contemporary with the Nazarenes." In another passage, "after mentioning the places, where they chiefly resided, viz. Peræa, Cœle-Syria, Pella and Cochabæ," he mentions that they had their origin *after* the removal of the Jewish Christians from Jerusalem, on the approach of the siege⁸.

On a general view of the evidence on this subject, not a single ancient writer is found, who has placed the origin of the Nazaræans and Ebionites before A. D. 70; they are commonly supposed to have been of later date; and on comparing ancient documents, modern writers have found it difficult to decide whether they were sects of the first, or second century. Le Clerc⁹ fixes one in the year 72, the

before the Cerinthians and Ebionites. Though the order is not exactly the same in Epiphanius, Augustine and Philaster, many sects, however, are placed before the Ebionites in all their catalogues.

⁶ Ναζωραῖοι καθεξῆς τούτοις ἔπονται, ἅμα τε αὐτοῖς ὄντες, ἢ καὶ πρὸ αὐτῶν, ἢ σὺν αὐτοῖς, ἢ μετ' αὐτοὺς ὁμῶς σύγχρονοι· οὐ γὰρ ἀκριβέστερον δύναμαι ἐξεῖπεν τίνες τίνας διεδέξαντο. Epiphani. Hær. xxix. initio. comp. Hær. xxx. p. 149.

Οὗτος γὰρ ὁ Ἐβίων σύγχρονος μὲν τοῦτων ὑπῆρχεν. Hær. xxx. § ii.

⁷ History of early Opinions, Vol. III. p. 164.

⁸ Hær. xxx. § vii.

⁹ Dr Priestley, without the testimony of any ancient writer, and without the countenance of any individual among the moderns, has

other in 103: Mosheim treats them both as heresies of the second century. When Toland asserted that they were the first and only Christians, his ignorance excited the astonishment of every scholar: and he was immediately refuted by an appeal to the ancient writers; a part of whose testimony I have just stated. "Those heretics," says one of his opponents, "whom Nazarenus calls the first and only Christians, were not known to the ancients till after the destruction of Jerusalem.—What accuracy, in other things, can be expected from a writer, when his ignorance or ill will leads him to mistake the name, the sentiments and *chronology* of that sect, which he defends¹?"

The professed object of Dr Priestley's history is to collect the sense of the New Testament, on the subject of the nature of Christ, *from the interpretation of the persons to whom Christ and his Apostles spoke and wrote*. This interpretation he proposes to discover through the medium of their religious opinions; and he ascertains (though not with accuracy) the sentiments of the Nazaræans and Ebionites, by the testimony of ancient writers. This is one material

reduced the three or the two sects of Ebionites and Nazaræans to one. The title of one of his Chapters runs thus: "Of the Nazarenes and Ebionites, showing that they were the same people, and that *none* of them believed the Divinity or pre-existence of Christ." In this Chapter he seems to intimate, (Vol. III. p. 178) that Le Clerc was of the same opinion with himself: ("The opinion that the Ebionites and Nazarenes were the same people is maintained by Le Clerc, and the most eminent critics of the last age"): whereas he has placed the origin of that sect, which believed in the miraculous conception of Christ, in the year seventy-two, and the other in A.D. 103. See his *Ecclesiastical History*, under those years.

¹ Mangey's Remarks upon Nazarenus, p. 59.

point gained; but, in order to attain his proposed end, it is necessary that he should prove by ancient testimony what Toland took for granted: his purpose is not accomplished, unless he proves the Ebionites and Nazarenes to have been the very first Jewish Christians. Knowing probably, from the failure and disgrace of Toland, that this is impossible, he sometimes contents himself with cautiously affirming "that both Ebionites and Nazaræans were existing in the time of the Apostles²:" and the evidence, which he has adduced, tends only to prove that they existed before the death of the Apostle John; sometimes, however, he has intimated, what he knew it was necessary for his purpose to prove, that the very first Jewish Christians were Ebionites³.

The body of collateral evidence which I have just stated, falling in with, and confirming the direct testimonies of Hegesippus, Eusebius and Sulpicius Severus, completely sets aside this unwarranted supposition. Either the members of the primitive church of Jerusalem were not Unitarians, or historians in placing the earliest Unitarians, and among these the Ebionites, at the end of the first, or the beginning of the second century, have been more unanimous

² History of early Opinions, Vol. III. p. 166.

³ P. 189, and 210—where he takes it for granted, that the original Jewish Christians were the same with the Ebionites. "No person can reflect upon this subject with proper seriousness, without thinking it a little extraordinary that *the Jewish Christians*, in so early an age as they are spoken of by the denomination of Ebionites, should be acknowledged to believe nothing either of the Divinity, or even of the pre-existence of Christ, if either of those doctrines had been taught *them* by the Apostles."

in relating a palpable falsehood than writers are usually observed to be in recording truth.

V. The whole evidence on this subject may be summarily stated under the following heads:

1. Several ancient Christian writers, who considered Unitarians as heretics, have declared that the church in general in the first age was (compared with succeeding times) free from heresy: several others have affirmed, in general terms, that the doctrines of the church were of greater antiquity than those of any of the sects: and the claims of the Unitarians of the third century to superior antiquity were immediately disproved by the members of the church: they were inconsistent with one another; and were advanced at random, without any knowledge of the history of the times, in which they asserted that their opinions had prevailed.

2. In the works of two historians, believers in the Divinity of Christ, the purity of the faith of the Hebrew church of Jerusalem in the first century is strongly attested. Both these writers were men of learning, and drew the materials for their histories from ancient documents; some of which are now lost: one of them, a native of Palestine, who wrote less than two centuries after the extinction of that church, expressly declares that he published his testimony on the authority of written records; and has happily preserved a fragment of Hegesippus, a Jewish Christian, a member of the Catholic church in the middle of the second century: the fragment

is taken from his history of the Christians of Jerusalem, and it contains strong testimony to the purity of their faith till the time of Trajan.

3. The origin of the Nazaræans and Ebionites is placed, by the concurrent testimony of several ancient historians, at the end of the first, or the beginning of the second century: and the first individuals, who believed in the simple humanity of Christ, are mentioned by name, by several writers. This is a clear, though indirect declaration, that the first members of the church of Jerusalem believed in the Divinity of Christ: had they not, they would have been Ebionites.

4. No ancient testimony can be found to oppose this evidence. No writer has asserted, that the members of the primitive church of Jerusalem believed in the simple humanity of Christ: no one has called them Ebionites: no one has placed Ebionitism, or Unitarianism of any kind, before the seventieth year after the birth of Christ.

CHAPTER XI.

THE INTERPRETATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT BY THE FIRST JEWISH CHRISTIANS, COLLECTED FROM THEIR RELIGIOUS OPINIONS.

1. The ancient testimonies, to the opinions of the *first* Jewish Christians, unopposed by any evidence except a prescriptive argument founded on the opinions of Ebionites, in the third century as described by Origen. Examination of this argument. Its weakness virtually allowed by Dr Priestley; who contends, that the opinions of one part of the Jewish Christians changed between A. D. 170, and 230. Origen's testimony not inconsistent with that of Hegesippus, Eusebius and Sulpicius. 2. Disappearance of Jewish Christians in most of the churches in the second century. Their extinction accounted for, from the combined influence of several causes. Judaism had been abandoned by some members, even of the church of Jerusalem, before the time of Adrian. It would probably be abandoned by the greater part of them after the edict of Adrian. Most of them would probably have ceased to be Jews (properly so called) before the time of Origen. Had Origen declared, that *all the Jews*, professing the Christian religion in his time, were Ebionites, his testimony would not be inconsistent with that of Hegesippus, Eusebius and Sulpicius.

I. IN the discussion of some historical questions, strong evidence is found on both sides; and it is necessary to attend with great care to repugnances, to weigh opposite testimonies, and to be decided by the preponderance of that side, on which sound judgment discerns the greater weight. In the present case, we have little labour beyond the easy task of stating coincidences. The only evidence adduced on one side, against strong testimony on the other, is *an argument* founded on a declaration of Origen, respecting the faith of Jewish Christians in the beginning of the *third century*.

An impartial inquirer after historical truth has great reason to complain, that, while the testimony on one side has not been fully and fairly stated in the *History of early Opinions*, or in any part of the long controversy before and after that history, the prescriptive argument deduced from Origen has been expanded beyond all reasonable bounds, and has been made to decide on a question, with which it has little or no connection.

One of the objects, of the philosophical compiler of this history, was to determine the interpretation of the New Testament, by the Jewish Christians in the *first century*, through the medium of their religious opinions. This object necessarily required him to give attention to all the testimony of credible historians among the ancients, on that particular subject; but instead of listening to the only evidence by which the opinions of the church of Jerusalem in the first century can be determined, he has betrayed a strong disposition to shrink from the whole of it: and has succeeded in drawing the attention of his opponents from the times before Adrian, to a period a full century later than the reign of that monarch.

After the regular historical evidence on the tenets of the Jewish Christians in the first century had been impartially stated and fully considered, the argument from Origen might also have been set forth in all its force. It would have been reasonable, after having collected and weighed the testimony of antiquity on this subject, to have given due attention

to the objections against it: it would have been proper, after having stated the common historical testimony, to have started the "historical doubts."

It might have been asked, with great propriety, How could it happen, if most of the Jewish Christians *of the first century* were believers in the Divinity of Christ, as they are said to have been by the only historians who have written expressly on this point, that Origen, in the beginning of the *third*, should speak of no Jewish Christians then existing, but Ebionites of two kinds? "This testimony of such a person as Origen, to the Unitarianism of all the Jewish Christians *in his time*, goes so near to prove the Unitarianism of the great body of Jewish Christians, and consequently of the Christian church in general, *in the time of the Apostles*, that I do not wonder at your wishing to set it aside¹."

This would have been a reasonable, though not a powerful objection. The writer, by whom it has been advanced, has suggested one of the means of its refutation. The force of the objection depends on the degree in which it is probable that the opinions of the Judaizing Christians continued the same, from the time of Adrian to the time of Origen, about a century. Those who are best acquainted with human nature, will judge how little stress can be laid on the immutability of human opinion during the course of a century, in which the opinions of the whole Roman world began to change, and the be-

¹ Letters to the Archdeacon of St Alban's, Part III. p. 4.

ginning of which was marked by one of the greatest convulsions in the political state of the Jews, that ever happened to any nation. How little can be depended on the immutability of the opinions of the Ebionites, during the second century, Dr Priestley has determined against himself.

In one part of his works, he has supposed that, before the time of Irenæus (A.D. 170), there existed only one sect of these Jewish Christians, and that sect denying the miraculous conception of Christ, as well as his Divinity. Now as Origen (A. D. 230) speaks of one sect of Ebionites denying, and *another* believing the miraculous conception, a great revolution must have taken place in the religious opinions of one part of the Ebionites in the space of forty or fifty years.

This supposition, I allow, is not consistent with history²: but, since Dr Priestley has admitted the possibility of such a change, since he has stated it as a fact—(“*Originally* the Jewish Christians did not believe the doctrine of the miraculous conception. Both Justin Martyr and *Irenæus* represent them as believing it, without excepting any that did. Origen is the first, who has noticed two kinds of Ebionites, one believing the miraculous conception, and

² Epiphanius, with more means of information than we are possessed of, was unable to determine with certainty which sect was the more ancient—the Nazaræans, who believed in the miraculous conception of Christ, or the Cerinthians: but, he has placed *both* before the Ebionites, in his catalogue: from his account, however, as well as from that of Eusebius and Theodoret, it appears that these three sects began to exist about the same time.

the other denying it¹:")—since he has even drawn important inferences from this supposed fact against the authenticity of the two first Chapters of St Matthew's Gospel;—his argument, founded on the *immutability* of the opinions of Jewish Christians from the first to the third century, is destroyed by his own authority.

If a revolution took place in the opinions of one part of the Jewish Christians in the short compass of forty or fifty years, the opinions of the whole body might have altered between the ages of Adrian and Origen. And, in fact, human opinion in different ages is too variable to enable us to draw conclusions, from one century to another, with certainty. If Origen, about A.D. 230, had related, that all Christians of Jewish extraction in his time were Unitarians, and had said nothing on the faith of the Jewish Christians of the first century; if, on the other hand, Hegesippus, Eusebius and Sulpicius Severus, about the years 170, 330, and 400, had related it, as an historical truth, that the great body of Jewish Christians, in the first century and the beginning of the second, believed in the Divinity of Christ; they would have advanced nothing absolutely inconsistent with each other's accounts. Historians of the eighteenth century have represented the great body of Englishmen in the fifteenth as Roman catholics: writers at the beginning of the seventeenth century have described the English of *their own time* as a nation of Protestants: yet these two accounts are

¹ History of early Opinions, B. III. c. ii. p. 215.

not inconsistent. There is nothing very improbable or absurd, we should say, in the representation of any of these writers: the fact, attested by Hegesippus, Eusebius and Sulpicius Severus, is totally distinct from that, which we admit on the authority of Origen: they bear testimony to different things; they speak of people removed more than a century from each other: human opinion, particularly in times of great political convulsions, is liable to change: in the second century, several causes existed, sufficient to effect a change in the opinions, customs and manners of Judaizing Christians: and these causes, we know, actually produced, at least, a partial effect: for in most of the churches, which in the first century were composed of Jews and Gentiles jointly, Judaism had disappeared, long before the end of the second.

II. Origen, it is said, in the beginning of the third century, speaks of no Jewish Christians, but Ebionites of two kinds: these are known to have been few in number, residing in Pella, and a few other parts of the East: whereas Jewish Christians had existed in considerable numbers in every church, in the beginning of the first century, and had, in fact, been the original stocks, from which the Gentile churches had sprung. How these Jews, professing the Christian religion, disappeared—is a question intimately connected with the present inquiry, and is in itself a subject deserving some consideration.

The difficulty and obscurity, with which this subject has been enveloped, are strongly expressed

in the History of early Opinions. "It is to be lamented that we know so very little of the history of the Jewish Christians. We are informed that they retired to Pella, a country to the east of the sea of Galilee, on the approach of the Jewish war, that many of them returned to Jerusalem when that war was over, and that they continued there till the city was taken by Adrian; but, what became of those, who were driven out of the city by Adrian, does not appear. It is most probable that they joined their brethren at Pella or Beræa in Syria, from whence they had come to reside at Jerusalem; and indeed what became of *the whole body of the ancient Christian Jews* (none of whom can be proved to have been Trinitarians) *I cannot tell*. Their numbers, we may suppose, were gradually reduced, till at length they became extinct¹."

Even in the middle of the second century, no traces are discoverable of Judaizing Christians, in any of the churches: and none appear to have existed even out of the churches, except a few individuals in some parts of the East. The Ebionites² were the last, who, in inconsiderable numbers, had a separate existence: and even they were gradually mingled

¹ Vol. III. p. 231.

² Epiphanius has related, that Ebion himself *preached* in Rome and Asia Minor: but, he says, the roots of their thorny doctrines were principally in Nabate, Paneas and Cochabæ, and even in Cyprus. Οὗτος μὲν οὖν ὁ Ἐβίων καὶ αὐτὸς ἐν τῇ Ἀσίᾳ εἶχε τὸ κήρυγμα καὶ Ῥώμῃ, τὰς δὲ ρίζας τῶν ἀκανθωδῶν παραφράδων ἔχουσιν ἀπὸ τε τῆς Ναβατέας καὶ Πανεάδος τὸ πλεῖστον, Μωαβίτιδός τε καὶ Κωχάβων τῆς ἐν τῇ Βασιανίτιδι γῇ ἐπέκεινα Ἀδραῶν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν τῇ Κύπρῳ. Hæc. xxx. § xviii.

with other Christians or with Jews, and disappeared altogether in the fifth or sixth century.

The extinction of the great body of Christian Jews, or in other words, their complete union with the Gentile Christians, may be accounted for, from the combined influence of several different causes, which are known to have operated with great force, in the first and second centuries.

1. The precepts and example of the Apostles, whose writings were read in the several churches of which the Jewish Christians were members, and who, if they permitted the observance of the Mosaic ritual according to ancient custom, at least taught its inutility. The precepts of St Paul are almost completely epitomized in these words:—"Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping the commandments of God³."

2. The prevalence of an opinion strongly insisted on by some of the earliest Christian writers⁴, that the Gospel was the substance of the ceremonial law; and that an observer of the precepts of Christianity was, in the utmost strictness of speaking, a follower of the precepts of Moses. This opinion seemed to remove all objection against the abandonment of this law; when Jews, by relinquishing its literal observance, ceased not to follow it, according to the common opinion, in a more perfect manner. Whatever pre-eminence they ascribed to the name of Israelites,

³ 1 Cor. vii. 9.

⁴ Barnabas, § II. 10. Irenæus, L. iv. c. xviii. xix. Clemens Alex. Pædag. L. III. c. xii. sub initio. Origen. Philocalia, c. i.

that pre-eminence they still enjoyed, and even acquired a superiority over their brethren, whose customs they had deserted. They considered Jews as *carnal*, and themselves as the *true spiritual* Israelites.

Non genus oblationum reprobaturum est: oblationes enim et illic, oblationes autem et hîc: sacrificia in populo, sacrificia in ecclesiâ; sed species immutata est tantum¹.....Munera autem et oblationes et sacrificia omnia in typo populus accepit, quemadmodum ostensum est Moysi in monte².

They would be the more readily induced to follow what was called the spiritual interpretation of the law, instead of its "carnal," i. e. literal signification, because some of the unbelieving Jews themselves had long been accustomed to receive many parts of it in an allegorical sense. Of these Philo is an instance. In this writer, the allegorical method of interpretation is carried to the highest pitch of extravagance: and it was probably an abuse of this sort of interpretation, that our Saviour alluded to, when he complained of the law having been explained away, or made of no effect by foolish traditions.

3. A third cause, which greatly contributed to effect a complete union between Gentile and Jewish Christians, was the general prevalence of the Greek language, in most parts of the world, where Jews resided. Many thousands of this people, who had lived in Alexandria ever since the time of the first two Ptolemies, and many others in different parts

¹ Irenæus, L. IV. c. xviii.

² L. IV. c. xix.

of Asia Minor and Greece, spoke and understood no other language. Even in Palestine, after the æra of the Seleucidæ, the use of the Greek language stood in nearly the same relation to that of the Syriac, as the English now bears to the Gaelic in some parts of Scotland. Some of the inhabitants spoke Greek³, which thus became of easy access to all; the greater part of them were only acquainted with the Syriac⁴; many would probably have a familiar knowledge of both; and some of their Roman masters were perhaps only acquainted with the Latin language. It was for the information of all descriptions of persons that the superscription on our Saviour's cross was in Hebrew (*i. e.* Syriac), Greek and Latin. All the New Testament, except the Gospel of St Matthew, was written in Greek, by men who had no more than a common education: Philo, an Alexandrian Jew, and Josephus of Jerusalem, wrote in the same language: the works of Aristo of Pella, Justin Martyr of Samaria, and Hegesippus, were also written in Greek: and most of the sacred books of the Ebionites were in this very general language.

The communication of opinion, between the Gentile and Jewish Christians, would be much facilitated by a common language, and would materially contribute to destroy all disagreement between them on the subject of the spiritual observance (*i. e.* in other words, the literal desertion) of the Mosaic Law.

³ Acts xxi. 37. Lightfoot, Hor. Hebr. in Matth. i. 23.

⁴ Josephus, Præf. in Antiq. Judaic. et Præf. in Bell. Judaic. and Acts xxi. 40.

4. The prevalent opinion of most of the Gentile Christians, at the end of the first and the beginning of the second century, on the sinfulness of Judaism, and their violence against Judaizers, particularly those who refused to communicate with them, must also have had some effect in detaching a part of these Christians from the observance of their Law. About A. D. 140, the intolerance of the Gentile Christians was become so extreme, that it was made a question, on which they were divided, whether those, who continued to follow the Mosaic ritual, could obtain salvation: and Justin himself decided in the negative, against those who attempted to impose the Jewish yoke on Gentiles, or who refused to communicate with them¹.

5. Another cause of the diminution of the numbers of Jewish Christians may be looked for in the persecution of Adrian; who prohibited all Jews from entering the neighbourhood of Jerusalem. Judaizing Christians were included in his decree: and it may reasonably be supposed that the horrors of a separation from their native country would induce many to abandon customs, which some of their fellow Christians had long thought indifferent, which others believed to be wicked, and which had at length become as offensive to their Roman conquerors as to the great body of Christians.

The joint operation of these causes—for they all acted at the same time—must have been almost irresistible: and when their force is properly appreciated,

² Justin Martyr, p. 230. et seq. Ed. Thirlby.

it will cease to be a matter of wonder that so few Christian Jews existed in the third century. Obscure, as the early part of the history of Christianity confessedly is, one complete revolution in the state of the Christian churches, and the existence of the causes which contributed to effect another, may be clearly traced out.

From the history of the Acts of the Apostles, and their Epistles in the New Testament, it appears, that Christians at first formed a body of incoherent parts. The Jews, at first, were the majority, and in some of the churches continued for a considerable time to bear a great proportion to their Gentile brethren; on whom they attempted to impose the burdensome and painful ceremonies of their law. Violent contentions, as it might be expected, were the consequences of this attempt: and the Gentile converts, after having defended themselves from the encroachments of Judaizers, were driven by the bitterness of opposition and a detestation of customs, which had been nearly forced on them, to an intolerance of the same nature with that, from which they had received so much annoyance; and actually declared it absurd even for Hebrews "to call themselves by the name of Jesus Christ and to Judaize." This hard sentence was pronounced by Ignatius², about A.D. 107. At first the contest was, whether all should follow the Law of Moses: it was finally decided, that it should be observed by none.

² Epist. to the Magnesians, § x.

The Christian Jews, in this situation, taught to relinquish their ancient customs, or at least to consider them as indifferent, by the lessons of the Apostles; relieved from their scruples by the common opinion, that an observer of the precepts of the Gospel was really and truly a follower of the Law of Moses; detested by their own nation, from which they had separated, and abhorred and anathematized by other Christians for not making the separation more complete; had hardly any resource left, but to abandon one party or the other, to become either mere Gentile Christians, or mere Antichristian Jews. Mixing with other Christians, who neither literally observed sabbaths, nor new moons, nor feasts, nor sacrifices—but who were persuaded, that they observed all these when understood in their true spiritual sense—they would gradually fall into the same opinions and practices; and the same neglect of the literal, or, as it was more commonly termed, the carnal interpretation of the Mosaic Law. To avoid the opprobrium annexed to Judaism, they would gladly lose their old name, connect themselves by intermarriages with other Christians, and sink into their customs; so that, in the time of Origen, it would not have been a matter of wonder, if no distinction could have been discovered between the great bodies of Jewish and Gentile Christians. They would be mixed and incorporated in one mass, being all in reality Gentile Christians, and all calling themselves “true spiritual Israelites.”

The first fifteen bishops of Jerusalem were circumcised Jews. This was the only church, which continued for any length of time to be composed entirely or principally of that people. But, before its extinction under Adrian, some of the causes which have been specified had operated so far as to have induced a few of the members even of this church to abandon the ritual parts of their Law. This may plainly be inferred from the account of Sulpicius Severus: who, after having mentioned that the violence of Adrian, in driving all Jews from Jerusalem, was useful to the Christian religion, immediately observes, “Because then *nearly* all” (the members of the church of Jerusalem) “believed Christ to be God, with the observance of the Law¹.”

But, after Adrian had prohibited all Jews from residing at Jerusalem—when their attachment to Judaism was already loosened by the example and precepts of the Apostles, and by the current of public opinion in all the other Christian churches, which had already begun to operate in their own—many of the members of this church would probably purchase the privilege of continuing in their own country, by relinquishing odious customs, which were beginning to grow out of date even among themselves, or would fly to other Christian churches; where finding Judaism proscribed by the reprobation of their brethren, no less than by the force of Adrian in Judea, they would gradually abandon all its distinctive customs and ceremonies, sink into the Gen-

¹ L. II. C. LXV.

tilism of Christianity, and be in reality “one fold under one shepherd.” Actuated by no motive but the force of former habits to continue in the profession of the Mosaic Law—impelled by the most violent reasons to abandon it, with the loud and terrifying voice of Christianity raised on all sides against Judaism, with the thunder of the synagogue already directed against apostates¹, and with the sword of an imperious conqueror driving them from their native country²—if they remained Jews, the few deserters of their ancient Law would increase, and soon become the multitude, and falling into the religion and customs of Gentile Christians, they would be so thoroughly incorporated with them in the course of a century, that, if Origen had really spoken of no Jewish Christians but Ebionites, his silence would be no argument against their existence.

Had the Ebionites been disposed to lay aside the observance of the ritual law, the peculiarity of their opinions on another subject would have prevented them from uniting with other Christians. They believed in the simple humanity of Christ; and this obnoxious article of their creed formed a perpetual bar against their admission into any of the churches; but, which existed not with the great body of Jewish Christians, “qui Christum Deum credebant.”

¹ Καταρώμενοι ἐν ταῖς συναγωγαῖς τοὺς πιστεύοντας ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰησοῦν. Justin M. Dial. p. 169.

² “Adrianus—militum cohortem custodias in perpetuum agitare jussit, quæ Judæos omnes Hierosolymæ aditu arceret.” Sulpicius Severus.

Had Origen then asserted, that the Ebionites were, as far as he knew, the only *Jews* professing the Christian Religion *in his time*, without explaining himself more fully afterwards—we should neither have reason to question his veracity, with one class of readers, nor to conclude, with another, that the Ebionites were the only Jewish Christians of the first century, because he knew of no others in the third.

CHAPTER XII.

THE INTERPRETATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT BY THE FIRST
JEWISH CHRISTIANS, COLLECTED FROM THEIR RELIGIOUS OPINIONS.

1—2. Opinions of Petavius, Tillemont, Mosheim, Horsley, Priestley, on the meaning of two passages in the opening of the second Book of Origen's treatise against Celsus, on the subject of the Christians of Jewish extraction in the third century. 3—4. Explanation of these passages. Both Celsus and Origen bear testimony to the existence of Christians of Jewish extraction, who had abandoned the observance of the Mosaic Law. 5. General view of Origen's reply to the first charge of Celsus, against the Christians of Jewish extraction. 6. Testimony of Celsus to the belief of the great body of Christians of Jewish extraction in the Divinity of Christ. This testimony confirmed by the acquiescence of Origen. 7. How far Origen has denied the truth of the charges of Celsus in the opening of the second Book.

I. FROM the united testimony of several ancient writers it appears that the Jewish Christians of the first century, in general, believed in the Divinity of Christ; and that no individuals appeared, who asserted his simple humanity, till towards the end of that century. Against this fact, so established, no testimony whatever has been opposed: and nothing has been advanced to call it in question, except a presumptive argument founded on the supposed testimony of Origen; who, it is asserted, has spoken of the Ebionites, as if they were the only Christians of Jewish extraction in his time, without having alluded to any others.

Had Origen really mentioned no others, it could only be concluded, that a complete intermixture had taken place between the Jewish Christians (described by Hegesippus, Eusebius and Sulpicius Severus) and

the Gentiles; not that those historians had asserted a falsehood. But, in fact, this testimony of Origen, like the silence of Eusebius on the religious tenets of Hegesippus, is a mere fiction: and both he and his antagonist Celsus must be brought forward to prove, what we might previously expect would be the fact, that most of the Christians of Jewish extraction, before the end of the second century, had deserted the Mosaic ritual, and believed in the Divinity of Christ.

II. In the opening of the second Book against Celsus, an apparent inconsistency between two passages, very near each other, has long since been observed. In the first of them it seems to be implied, that all Christians of Jewish extraction observed the ritual law in the age of the writer, and were called Ebionites. Μηδὲ τοῦτο κατανοήσας, ὅτι οἱ ἀπὸ Ἰουδαίων εἰς τὸν Ἰησοῦν πιστεύοντες οὐ καταλελοίπασιν τὸν πατριὸν νόμον· βιοῦσι γὰρ κατ' αὐτὸν, ἐπώνυμοι τῆς κατὰ τὴν ἐκδοχὴν πτωχείας τοῦ νόμου γεγεννημένοι. Ἐβίων τε γὰρ ὁ πτωχὸς παρὰ Ἰουδαίοις καλεῖται καὶ Ἐβιωναῖοι χρηματίζουσιν οἱ ἀπὸ Ἰουδαίων τὸν Ἰησοῦν, ὡς Χριστὸν, παραδεξάμενοι¹. “Not having been aware of this, that the Jews who believe in Jesus *have not deserted* the ancient law of their country: for they live according to it, receiving a name from the poverty of the law, according to their acceptation² of it: for a beggar is called among the Jews Ebion: and they of the Jews,

¹ P. 56. Ed. Spencer.

² See Valesius, on the term ἐκδοχή, in a note on Eusebius, L.vi. c. xiii.

who have received Jesus as the Christ, go by the name of Ebionæans."

Though the second passage has been very imperfectly and erroneously understood, it is universally allowed that mention is made in it of two sorts of Jewish Christians at least, some of whom *had deserted* the literal observance of the law.

Καὶ ὡς συγκεχυμένως γε τᾶνθ' ὁ παρὰ τῷ Κέλσῳ Ἰουδαῖος λέγει, δυνάμενος πιθανώτερον εἰπεῖν, ὅτι τινὲς μὲν ἡμῶν καταλελοίπασιν τὰ ἔθνη, προφάσει διηγήσεων καὶ ἀλληγοριῶν· τινὲς δὲ καὶ διηγούμενοι, ὡς ἐπαγγέλλεσθε, πνευματικῶς, οὐδὲν ἤττον τὰ πάτρια τηρεῖτε· τινὲς δὲ οὐδὲ διηγούμενοι, βούλεσθε καὶ τὸν Ἰησοῦν παραδέξασθαι ὡς προφητευθέντα, καὶ τὸν Μωϋσέως νόμον τηρῆσαι κατὰ τὰ πάτρια· ὡς ἐν τῇ λέξει ἔχοντες τὸν πάντα τοῦ πνεύματος νοῦν¹.

The first of these passages seems, at first sight, not only inconsistent with the second, but is also at variance with other parts of Origen, in which he treats Ebionites with the utmost contempt, and mentions them merely as persons who *call themselves* Christians.

Petavius² has attempted to reconcile Origen with himself and other writers, by supposing, that in the

¹ P. 59. Origen, in another work, has distinguished between the true *spiritual* interpreter of Moses (the true Christian) and the two parties among the unbelieving Jews, one of which understood the words of the Lawgiver only in their literal sense, while the individuals of the other, by means of false allegory, explained away the Law, which *they professed to interpret*. See Basnage, History of the Jews, B. II. c. ix. s. 2 and 9, and the first passage in Origen, to which he refers.

² Verum Ebionæorum nomen latius extendisse videri potest Origenes; ut Ebionæos illos appellet, qui cum alioqui de Christi Divinitate

first of the passages he has used the term 'Εβωναῖοι in a more enlarged sense than usual, having extended it to all Jewish Christians, whether Ebionites properly so called or not.

Tillemont supposes an inaccuracy of expression in the first passage; but, with equal candour and justice, allows Origen the privilege of explaining himself, and supposes the error corrected, or rather the obscurity removed, in the second. "Origen seems to say, that in his time all the converted Jews still observed it (the Law). For, when Celsus accused them of having changed their name and life, Origen answers, that they followed the law, and were called Ebionites. However he explains himself a little afterwards, and declares, that of the Jewish Christians there were some who had quitted the law, and others, who joined it together with the faith of Jesus Christ³."

Mosheim and Dr Horsley have supposed, that Origen has asserted a wilful falsehood in the first passage, and spoken the truth in the second.

Dr Priestley contends that the first passage is true, as a general proposition, and that the exceptions to it are mentioned in the second. He supposes that Origen, in the last passage, alludes to *a few* Jewish Christians, who had abandoned their ancient customs; while the great body of them (described

tate recte sentirent, cum Christianâ religione Judaicas ceremonias amplectendas crederent: quod quidem tomo II. sub initium significare videtur. Petavius, Annot. in Epiphan. de Hær. Ebion.

³ Tillemont. Mem. Eccl. under Cerinthus.

in general terms in the first¹) had not. He agrees with all the others, who have turned their attention to this part of Origen—(in this also Tillemont seems to agree with them)—in supposing that those Jewish *Christians*, who had deserted the Law, are alluded to in the words, *τινὲς ἡμῶν καταλελοίπασι τὰ ἔθνη, προφάσει διηγρήσεων καὶ ἀλληγοριῶν*:—"Some of *us* have deserted the established customs, under the pretext of following allegorical interpretations."

III. Great obscurity in the opening of Origen's second Book there certainly is; but, I think, no contradiction. The second of the passages in question is, in reality, a continuation of the first; for, nearly the whole matter between them is in the form of a digression. It would be highly improbable, on this account, as well as others, that he should assert a wilful falsehood in the one, and directly contradict himself in the other.

In order to understand the beginning of the second Book, it is necessary to keep in view a very prevailing notion in the first ages of Christianity, on the nature of the relation between the Mosaic Law and the Gospel. An opinion, which was entertained by perhaps the generality of Christians on this subject, was carried by Origen, as it had been

¹ Letters to the Archdeacon of St Alban's, Part III. Letter i. He is not very consistent with himself, when he says, that "Origen expressly informs us, that in his time *all* the Jewish Christians went by that name" (Ebionites). Hist. Vol. iv. p. 72. And, "You make very light of the Ebionites: but, according to the testimony of Origen, they were the *whole body* of Jewish Christians." Letter iii. to Dr Geddes.

before by the author of the Epistle of Barnabas, to the most extravagant pitch. He considered all parts of the law, even the most minute, as types of different parts of the Gospel dispensation. The Gospel, in his opinion, was the *substance* of what many parts of the law were *only* a shadow. He thought, that the primary object of the Mosaic ceremonies was the prefiguration of different parts of the Christian system; that the ritual law was intended by God, when delivered to the Israelites, to serve, as it were, for a model of the great work of Christianity; and that its design and meaning were never seen till the veil was removed from before it, at the appearance of Christ².

It was reserved for the successful labours of Maimonides and Spencer to discover, that the primary objects of the laws of Moses was the extinction and prevention of idolatry of every kind: and that injunctions, which at first sight appear absurd or trifling, derived significance and wisdom by acting in subservience to so important an end. Origen, not possessed of this key, persuaded himself, that some parts of the Pentateuch were nugatory, others impracticable and delusive³, and false⁴ in their literal sense;

² Τὸ ἐννάρχον δὲ φῶς τῷ Μωσέως νόμῳ, καλύμματι ἐναποκεκρυμμένον, συνέλαμψε τῇ Ἰησοῦ ἐπιδημία, περιαιρεθέντος τοῦ καλύμματος, καὶ τῶν ἀγαθῶν κατὰ βραχὺ εἰς γνῶσιν ἐρχομένων, ὧν σκιὰν εἶχε τὸ γράμμα. Philocalia, c. i. p. 5.

³ Αἰτία δὲ πᾶσι τοῖς προειρημένοις ψευδοδοξιῶν καὶ ἀσεβειῶν ἡ ἰδιωτικῶν περὶ θεοῦ λόγων οὐκ ἄλλη τίς εἶναι δοκεῖ ἢ ἡ γραφὴ κατὰ τὰ πνευματικὰ μὴ νενοημένη, ἀλλ' ὡς πρὸς τὸ ψιλὸν γράμμα ἐξειλημμένη. Philocalia, c. i. p. 7. Ed. Spenc.

⁴ He supposes the History in the beginning of Genesis to be only true in a figurative sense. Philoc. c. i. pp. 12, 13.

that some laws had even *no meaning* except an allegorical one relating to Christianity; and he has formally laid it down, as an established maxim, that all parts of the Old and New Testament “have a spiritual,” *i. e.* an allegorical sense; but, that “all have not a bodily,” *i. e.* a literal, “meaning¹.” All true Christians, all the members of the Christian church, he maintained, were strictly and truly followers of the Mosaic Law; the Gospel sanctioning the moral part, and being in itself the *real substance* of the ceremonial; and, according to his principles, Christians were more truly followers of this law than the Jews themselves².

Without attending to these sentiments of Origen, it is impossible to fully comprehend the opening of the second book, and many other parts of his works.

IV. Celsus lived in the time of the Antonines: he might perhaps be even as early as the age of Adrian, where Origen has placed him³; and had probably been witness, in the early part of his life, to the desertion of the Mosaic Law by great numbers of Jewish Christians. In that part of his attack on Christianity which Origen answers in his second book, he had introduced a Jew expostulating with his fel-

¹ Εἰσι τινες γραφαὶ τὸ σωματικὸν οὐδαμῶς ἔχουσαι—ἐστὶν ὅπου οἰονεὶ τὴν ψυχὴν καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς γραφῆς μόνον χρὴ ζητεῖν. Philoc. c. i. p. 9.

Διακείμεθα γὰρ ἡμεῖς περὶ πάσης τῆς θείας γραφῆς, ὅτι πάντα μὲν ἔχει τὸ πνευματικόν, οὐ πάντα δὲ τὸ σωματικόν. P. 16.

² Philoc. c. i. pp. 16, 17.

³ Orig. cont. Cels. L. i. sub initio.

low-countrymen; “who,” the Jew says, “had been very ridiculously duped in having relinquished the law of their country by the seduction of Jesus, and had gone over to another name and another mode of life⁴.” He seems to intimate, that some had abandoned their ancient laws in his time:—“You have left the ancient law of your country both yesterday, and a little time since, and when we punished this author of your delusion⁵.”

In answer to this, Origen observes, “They of *the Jews*⁶ (*i.e.* those who have continued mere Jews by remaining unmixed with other Christians) who

⁴ Τί παθόντες κατελίπετε τὸν πατριὸν νόμον, καὶ ὑπ’ ἐκείνου
ψυχαγωγηθέντες, πάνν γελοίως ἐξηπατήσθητε, καὶ ἀφ’ ἡμῶν ἀπην-
τομολήσατε εἰς ἄλλο ὄνομα καὶ εἰς ἄλλον βίον; P. 57.

⁵ Χθὲς καὶ πρόην καὶ ὀπηνίκα τοῦτον ἐκολάζομεν βουκολοῦντα
ὑμᾶς, ἀπέστητε τοῦ πατρίου νόμον. P. 59.

⁶ It is on many accounts to be regretted, that the work of Celsus has not been preserved. To those that are acquainted with the petty cavils, to which Origen had frequently recourse, it will not appear improbable, that this part of his answer was only intended as a captious objection against *the language* which Celsus had employed. He had probably introduced his Jew addressing THE JEWS (instead of the Christians of Jewish extraction) who believed in Jesus (τῶν ἀπὸ τοῦ λαοῦ τῶν Ἰουδαίων εἰς τὸν Ἰησοῦν πιστευσάντων—οἱ, τοὺς ἀπὸ Ἰουδαίων, see p. 56.) Though this language could not be misunderstood, it was not strictly proper: for if they had really abandoned Judaism and mixed with other Christians, they had actually ceased to be Jews: and the only proper Jews believing in Christ were Ebionites, who preserved their nationality by remaining distinct from other Christians. It is observable, that as soon as Origen begins to speak of Christians of Jewish extraction, *who had deserted* the literal observance of the Mosaic law, instead of Ἰουδαῖοι, he introduces the more general and less odious term Ἰσραηλῖται (pp. 58, 59,) a title by which even Gentile Christians thought themselves honoured. It is the fastidious accuracy of a carping controversialist, and not either wilful or inadvertent misrepresentation, that we mostly recognize in Origen’s treatise against Celsus.

believe in Jesus, have not abandoned the ancient law of their country; for they live according to it, receiving a name from the poverty of the law, according to their acceptation of it. For a beggar is called among the Jews Ebion: and they of the Jews, who have received Jesus as the Christ, go by the name of Ebionæans."

Origen, however, knew that it would be a very insufficient answer to Celsus, to say that the Ebionites, or "those of the Jews" (properly so called) professing the Christian religion, had not deserted the laws of their ancestors: these were two extremely inconsiderable sects, totally unknown in all the countries through which Christianity was then diffused, except a few parts of the East; where they existed in small numbers: and Origen himself has treated them with great contempt by calling them heresies¹, who boasted that they were Christians²; and who betrayed the poverty of their intellect by not being able to ascend to the spiritual interpretation of their law³. He knew that, besides these two petty bodies of men, hardly numerous enough to merit the name of heresies, many Christians of Jew-

¹ Εἰσι γάρ τινες αἰρέσεις τὰς Παύλου ἐπιστολὰς τοῦ ἀποστόλου μὴ προσίεμεναι, ὥσπερ Ἑβριωνᾶιοι ἀμφοτέρω. L. v. cont. Cels. p. 274.

² Ἔστωσαν δέ τινες καὶ τὸν Ἰησοῦν ἀποδεχόμενοι, ὡς παρὰ τοῦτο Χριστιανοὶ εἶναι αὐχοῦντες· ἔτι δὲ καὶ κατὰ τὸν Ἰουδαίων νόμον ὡς τὰ Ἰουδαίων πλήθῃ βιοῦν ἐθέλοντες· οὗτοι δ' εἰσὶν οἱ διττοὶ Ἑβριωνᾶιοι, ἧτοι ἐκ παρθένου ὁμολογοῦντες ὁμοίως ἡμῖν τὸν Ἰησοῦν, ἧ οὐχ οὕτω γεγεννησθαι, ἀλλ' ὡς τοὺς λοιποὺς ἀνθρώπους. P. 272.

³ Οὐκ ἐλαμβάνομεν ταῦτα ὡς οἱ πτωχοὶ τῇ διανοίᾳ Ἑβριωνᾶιοι τῆς πτωχείας τῆς διανοίας ἐπώνυμοι. Philocalia, c. i. p. 17. Ed. Spenc.

ish extraction existed in most parts of the world, where the religion of Christ was established: these, by their intermixture with other Christians, and their desertion of the ritual law, had, properly speaking, ceased to be Jews. In order to demonstrate, that they too had not deserted the Law of Moses—a matter of far more difficulty, and which none but an allegorist would have thought of attempting—it was necessary for him to show in what the *true* spiritual Law of Moses consisted: *τίς ὁ ἀληθὴς νόμος*⁴: what heavenly truths were *represented* by the different parts of the Jewish worship; what *shadow* of future blessings was exhibited in laws about meats and drinks and new moons and festivals and sabbaths: and in these, he supposes, the Apostles were instructed after the ‘crucifixion of Christ; this being the great mystery, which was to be revealed to them, and which they could not bear before⁵. The several parts of the Christian system formed, in Origen’s opinion, the *true* Law of Moses.

Having thus prepared the way for a complete answer to Celsus, he asks, “How is it, that those have deserted the law of their country, who censure the neglect of it in others?” He then instances St Paul, who presses on the Galatians and Corinthians the observance of the moral part of the Mosaic Law, and the ritual law also in its allegorical sense⁶: (he has afterwards spoken of Christians being taught by Christ “to *relinquish* bodily circumcision, bodily sabbaths,

⁴ L. ii. cont. Cels. p. 57.

⁵ See p. 57. Ἐπεὶ δ’ ἀπαξ, κ. τ. ε.

⁶ Page 59.

bodily feasts, bodily new moons, and clean and unclean meats; and to transfer the mind to a *law* worthy of God, and *true* and spiritual¹): and he at last proceeds to a full and accurate answer²; in which, consistently with his usual practice, he retorts the accusation of the Jew of Celsus on the unbelieving Jews themselves.

“How confusedly the Jew in Celsus speaks on this subject, when he might more credibly say, that some of us” (unbelieving Jews) “have deserted the established customs, under a pretext of” (following) “allegorical interpretations: but, some of you” (Christians of Jewish extraction, to whom the Jew of Celsus professedly addresses himself) “guided, as you allege, by a spiritual interpretation³, nevertheless” (in following this interpretation) “observe the ancient laws of your country” (in their spiritual sense, with-

¹ Ἡ ἀνόσιον μὲν τὸ ἀφιστάνειν σωματικῆς περιτομῆς, καὶ σωματικοῦ σαββάτου, καὶ σωματικῶν ἑορτῶν, καὶ σωματικῶν νουμνηνῶν, καὶ καθαρῶν καὶ ἀκαθάρτων· μετατιθέναι δὲ τὸν νοῦν ἐπὶ νόμον θεοῦ ἄξιον καὶ ἀληθῆ καὶ πνευματικόν. p. 61.

² See p. 170. of this Volume.

³ “Guided by a spiritual interpretation”—(διηγούμενοι πνευματικῶς.)—Πνευματικὴ δὲ διήγησις τῷ δυναμένῳ ἀποδείξαι ποίων ἐπουρανίων ὑποδείγματι καὶ σκιᾷ οἱ κατὰ σάρκα Ἰουδαῖοι ἐλάτρεον· καὶ τίνων μελλόντων ἀγαθῶν ὁ νόμος ἔχει σκιάν. “The spiritual interpretation is that of the person, who is able to show of what heavenly things the *carnal* Jews served the model and shadow, and of what future blessings the law contains the shadow.” Philocalia, c. i. p. 10. In this place he produces the same instance from St Paul, by which he has illustrated his notion of spiritual interpretation in the second Book against Celsus. “Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn.” This precept, understood literally (or, in Origen’s language, *carnally*) by the Jews, was understood and followed by Christians in its true spiritual sense.

out being misled by *false* allegory, like some of us Jews); "and others of you" (*i. e.* the Ebionites of both kinds) "without interpreting" (spiritually,) "are yet disposed both to receive Jesus, as" (the Messiah) "predicted by the prophets, and also to observe the Law of Moses agreeably to the ancient practice of your country, placing all the spiritual sense in the mere letter."

It may be observed, in illustration of the first part of this passage, which, I think, has been very much misunderstood, that the works of Philo will be a lasting monument of the application of false allegory to explain away the meaning of the writings of Moses: and in this, Philo was not singular; since our Saviour himself complained of those, who had made even the moral law "of none effect by foolish traditions." In his time, some of the scribes, or interpreters of the Law, adhered to the literal sense, others called in the aid of allegory⁴: it must have been through some allegorical interpretation, that the *Jew* Elxai affirmed sacrifices to have been neither taught by Moses in the Pentateuch, nor practised by the Patriarchs⁵: and, by comparing Josephus with Philo, it appears, that the Essenes considered themselves as strictly followers of the Law, but not in its literal sense; that they adopted the allegorical method of interpreting it, and thought that it was not to be understood without divine inspiration⁶; and

⁴ See the two Chapters in Beausobre's *Introd. to the New Test.* on "The Jewish prophets and scribes," and on "The Jewish sects."

⁵ Epiphanius de Hær. Judaic. Ossen. p. 42.

⁶ Philo, Vol. II. p. 458. Ed. Mangey; Josephus, L. II. c. viii. de Bell. Jud.

it must probably have been in consequence of their allegorical explanations, that they insisted on the inutility of sacrifices¹.

In this passage of Origen, the *Christians* of Jewish extraction are divided into two classes, both of whom, he asserts, in answer to Celsus, were observers of the Mosaic Law: those, whom he first mentions, were followers of it in its true spiritual sense; the others, *i. e.* the Ebionites of both kinds, adhered to the letter.

He then observes, that the Jew of Celsus continues to attack the same people: "How is it that you set out from our holy religion, but despise it as you go on? since you can mention no other foundation of your doctrine than our law²." Origen, continuing his defence of these Jewish Christians, replies, "They do not," as you contend, "despise what is written in the law, as they go on; but, add greater honour to it, shewing what a profundity of mystic wisdom the words contain, which were never understood by the Jews, who only touch their surface³."

¹ Ἐπειδὴ καὶ τοῖς μάλιστα θεραπευταὶ θεοῦ γεγονόασιν, οὐ ζῶα καταθύοντες ἀλλ' ἱεροπρεπεῖς τὰς ἑαυτῶν διανοίας κατασκευάζειν ἄξιουντες. Phil. Vol. II. p. 457. Ed. Mangey. The same sense is perhaps conveyed in the words of Josephus, ἐφ' αὐτῶν τὰς θυσίας ἐπιτελοῦσιν. Antiq. Jud. L. XVIII. c. i. See the context.

² Πῶς ἄρχεσθε μὲν ἀπὸ τῶν ἡμετέρων ἱερῶν, προϊόντες δὲ αὐτὰ ἀτιμάζετε; οὐκ ἔχοντες ἄλλην ἀρχὴν εἰπεῖν τοῦ δόγματος, ἢ τὸν ἡμέτερον νόμον. p. 59.

³ Οὐχ, ὡς λέγετε, δὲ οἱ προϊόντες ἀτιμάζουσι τὰ ἐν νόμῳ γεγραμμένα· ἀλλὰ πλείονα τιμὴν αὐτοῖς περιτιθέασιν, ἀποδεικνύντες ὅσον ἔχει βάθος σοφῶν καὶ ἀπορρήτων λόγων ἐκεῖνα τὰ γράμματα, τὰ ὑπὸ Ἰουδαίων οὐ τεθεωρημένα, τῶν ἐπιπολαιότερον (καὶ μυθικώτερον) αὐτοῖς ἐντυγχάνόντων. p. 59.

Though his answer to the accusation of Celsus, against the Jewish Christians for deserting the law of their ancestors, is highly laboured, and is, on his principles, perfectly accurate, its legitimacy will not be allowed by any but those, who, with him, admit all the extravagances of allegorical interpretation. In fact, the testimony of Origen to the desertion of the ritual law by the great body of Jewish Christians, must be considered as joined to that of Celsus: they both bear witness to the same thing; they differ only in their manner of expressing it. Origen fully admits, that a body of Jewish Christians had ascended to the spiritual meaning of the Law, like their brethren among the Gentiles, and therefore could not be Ebionites of either kind; since, by his express declaration, both sorts of Ebionites received their name from the poverty of their intellect in not admitting any besides its "carnal" or literal meaning, and observed its precepts like other Jews.

The evidence of Celsus is clear and strong: and as he lived, at least, near the time of Adrian, when the greatest desertion from the Mosaic Law probably took place, it must have great weight, even had it not been confirmed by Origen: but, when the latter writer also reports, that some Jewish Christians followed the law in a literal, and others in a "true spiritual" sense, a sense, which he affirms to be unknown to the Jews and Ebionites of *both* kinds; he, in other words, asserts that it was adhered to by some, and relinquished by others; and fully confirms the testimony of Celsus. The two writers are recon-

ciled by this single consideration, that the spiritual observance of the Mosaic Law, in Origen's sense, is the same with its abandonment, as described by Celsus.

V. So far, I have only noticed as much of Origen's answer as was necessary to explain two difficult and disputed passages in the opening of the second book. His whole reply to this charge, when explained by a comparison with other parts of his works, may be reduced under the following heads.

1. The accusation of deserting their ancient laws and customs, urged by the Jew in Celsus against Jewish Christians, would have been more applicable to the heathen converts to Christianity: "His account would have appeared highly credible, had it been written to us," Gentile Christians¹. Gentile Christians have really deserted their ancient laws and customs, in order to follow the Mosaic Law² in its true spiritual sense.

2. "*Those of the Jews*" at present, who believe in Christ, (the Ebionites of *both* kinds) who have remained mere Jews by keeping themselves distinct from Gentile Christians, and "who boast that they are Christians," have not deserted the Mosaic Law,

¹ Καὶ αὐτό γε τοῦτο πρῶτον ἐφίσταμεν, τί δήποτε ἅπαξ κρίνας προσωποποιεῖν ὁ Κέλσος, οὐ προσωποποιεῖ Ἰουδαῖον πρὸς τοὺς ἀπὸ τῶν ἐθνῶν πιστεύοντας λέγοντα, ἀλλὰ πρὸς τοὺς ἀπὸ Ἰουδαίων. πιθανώτατος δ' αὖ καὶ ἔδοξεν ὁ λόγος εἶναι αὐτῷ πρὸς ἡμᾶς γραφόμενος. p. 56.

² Πᾶσα δὲ Ἑλλάς, καὶ βάρβαρος ἢ κατὰ τὴν οἰκουμένην, ζηλωτὰς ἔχει μυρίους καταλιπόντας τοὺς πατρίους νόμους καὶ νομιζομένους θεοὺς, τῆς τηρήσεως τῶν Μωσείως νόμων, καὶ τῆς μαθητείας τῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ λόγων. Philocalia, c. i. p. 2. Ed. Spenceri.

not even the letter of it: they have received a name to distinguish them from those, who understand and follow the Law in a more just, spiritual and exalted sense; and they are still mere Jews, mere carnal Israelites—(σαρκικοί Ἰσραηλῖται³). Celsus has urged his accusation, without having been aware even of this: μηδὲ τοῦτο κατανοήσας.

3. The Apostles themselves observed the Mosaic ritual, adhering to the literal meaning for some time; Peter, before he had been informed by the Holy Spirit of its spiritual meaning; and Paul, with others, in compliance with the prejudices of the Jews. He became to them as a Jew, in order to gain the Jews⁴.

4. Those of the Jewish Christians cannot be said to have deserted the Law, who, with Paul, follow the moral part of it, and who, with him also, obey the ceremonial part, interpreting it in its true spiritual sense, *e. g.* who obey, in its true allegorical sense, this precept of the law, “Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn.” “How have those deserted the laws of their country, who have them always in their mouths, and say, Does not the law teach this⁵? For, in the Law of Moses it is written, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen? or, sayeth he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, it is written⁶.”

5. Celsus, then, has written confusedly on the subject: his Jew would have spoken more credibly

³ Compare Orig. cont. Cels. p. 56 with p. 274, and Philocalia, p. 17.

⁴ See pp. 56 and 57.

⁵ 1 Corinth. ix. 8.

⁶ Pages 58 and 59.

(πιθανώτερον¹) had he declared, that *all* Christians of Jewish extraction are observers of the Law of Moses; some following it, like Gentile Christians, in its true spiritual sense, as they have been taught by St Paul, having relinquished bodily circumcision, and all other distinctive marks of Judaism; others, who are now the only proper Jews believing in Christ, rejecting the explications of St Paul, and calling him a deserter of their law, still adhere, like other Jews, to the literal observance of its precepts².

VI. Origen, if he be allowed the usual privilege of explaining his own words, has not asserted a wilful falsehood in one page, and flatly contradicted himself in the next: nor has he related, that all the Christians of Jewish extraction were Ebionites: it would have been truly wonderful, if he had. For his second book against Celsus contains the most decisive proofs that *the great body* of Jewish Christians had both relinquished the literal observance of the ceremonial law, and believed in the Divinity of Christ.

St Paul, whom both sects of Ebionites rejected, is made, as it were, the representative of Israelitish Christians³. Both the Jews and Gentiles, who may have deviated from the letter of the law, are defended⁴. ("It is not to be inferred, because John the Baptist was a Jew, that every believer either

¹ V. Steph. Thesaur.

² Compare pp. 59 and 274.

³ Page 58.

⁴ Οὐ γὰρ, ἐπεὶ Ἰουδαῖος ἦν (Ἰωάννης), συνάγεται, ὅτι δεῖ πάντα τὸν πιστεύοντα, εἴτ' ἀπὸ τῶν ἐθνῶν προσέρχεται τῷ λόγῳ, εἴτε ἀπὸ Ἰουδαίων, κατὰ τὸ γράμμα τὸν Μωϋσέως τηρεῖν νόμον. p. 60.

of the Gentiles *or Jews* ought to observe the Law of Moses according to the letter.") And Christians are mentioned, who had been taught by Christ to relinquish bodily circumcision, bodily feasts⁵, &c. which will neither apply to Ebionites, who still observed them, nor to Gentile Christians, by whom they had never been practised.

The second book, it must be recollected, is particularly set apart to answer the criminations urged by Celsus against the Christians of Jewish extraction. Having mentioned the subject of the first book, he says—"We propose to draw up this, in answering the accusations urged by him against those, of the people of the Jews, who have believed in Jesus⁶." In this book, he has fortunately cited many passages from the work of Celsus, in which the philosopher has introduced a Jew reproaching his countrymen, who were converted to Christianity, for *deifying* Christ. He repeatedly speaks of Christ as their God, accuses them of calling their Son of God, the Word, *αὐτόλογον*, and complains that they criminate the Jews for not believing Christ to be God. It will be sufficient to cite one out of a multitude of passages to this purpose, without more than a bare reference to others⁷.

Origen, having observed⁸ that the Jew of Celsus was addressing his countrymen converted to Christianity, soon after cites this sentence from his address;

⁵ Page 61.

⁶ Page 56.

⁷ Pages 61—63, 71, 72, 74, 75, 78—82.

⁸ Page 93.

“He (Christ) certainly no longer feared any one; and being, *as you say*, a God,” &c¹.

This testimony seems decisive. We have the reiterated declarations of Celsus, in the middle of the second century, confirmed by the acquiescence of Origen, at the beginning of the third, that the great body of Jewish Christians believed in the Divinity of Christ. The second book is professedly written to refute the accusations alleged against this body of men: and few literary works have ever been examined with more critical severity, than the writings of the heathen philosopher, by his learned antagonist.

In different parts of his work, Origen has most rigorously scrutinized those parts of the book of Celsus, which professedly or incidentally treated on the opinions or practices of Jews and Jewish Christians; and has frequently selected passages merely for the purpose of pointing out a mistake, though the exposure was of no consequence in forwarding the great design of his work, the defence of Christianity. In the very opening of his second book, after having mentioned that the Jew of Celsus had been introduced expostulating with his countrymen for deserting the laws of their ancestors, he immediately denied the fact; and asserted, that the accusation, of deserting their ancient laws, and going over to a new name and a new mode of life, could only apply to Gentile Christians. In the same book, he has

¹ Οὐ γὰρ δὴ ἔτι ἐφοβείτο τινα ἀνθρώπων ἀποθανών, καὶ, ὡς φατέ, θεὸς ὢν. p. 101.

produced a multitude of extracts from Celsus, in which the Christians, against whom the philosopher directed his attacks, are accused of considering Christ as God.

Had all, or even the majority of Christians of Jewish extraction, been Unitarians, Origen's triumph over his adversary on this subject would have been complete, and he would have insulted over his want of information with the utmost exultation: continually on the watch for inaccuracies of any sort, either in favour of the cause, which he was supporting, or against it, he would have made the most of such an enormous blunder as this: "Celsus," he would have said, "is not even aware that they are only *Gentile* Christians, who believe in the Divinity of Christ: how excessive must be his ignorance on a subject, which he has presumed to handle, when he has accused Jewish Christians of deserting the Laws of Moses, which they all continue to follow, and of believing in the Divinity of Christ, whom they, with few exceptions, hold to be a mere man."

Instead of this correction of his adversary's mistake, he has acquiesced in the whole of *this* accusation: instead of denying the truth of the fact, he has endeavoured to prove its reasonableness, and has considered the faith of the great body of these Christians as identified with that of the church at large².

VII. In opposition to the testimony of several ancient historians on the belief of the *first* Jewish

Christians, it has lately been said, that, according to Origen's account, there were no Jewish Christians, except Ebionites of two kinds, in his time. Both Origen and Celsus, however, speak decidedly of others besides Ebionites: this is all that it is *necessary* to observe, in order to set aside the objection against the testimonies of Hegesippus, Eusebius, and Sulpicius Severus. But, in addition to this, Celsus has by many repeated declarations borne the fullest testimony to the belief of the Christians of Jewish extraction, in general, in the Divinity of Christ; and Origen acquiesces in, and allows this part of his adversary's charge.

To this it will perhaps be objected, that the acquiescence of Origen is problematical; since he has perhaps raised doubts, about the truth of every part of the statement of Celsus on this subject, in the very opening of his second book. He expresses his surprise that his opponent has not introduced his Jew addressing himself to the believers of the Gentiles rather than to the believing Jews: "his words addressed to *us* would have appeared very highly credible. But he, who professes to know every thing, in this place knows not what is suitable to the *προσοποία*¹."

After this declaration, it may be said, Origen's posterior silence on any particular part of the charges

¹ Καὶ αὐτό γε τοῦτο πρῶτον ἐφίσταμεν, τί δήποτε ἅπαξ κρίνας προσωποποιεῖν ὁ Κέλσος, οὐ προσωποποιεῖ Ἰουδαῖον πρὸς τοὺς ἀπὸ τῶν ἐθνῶν πιστεύοντας λέγοντα, ἀλλὰ πρὸς τοὺς ἀπὸ Ἰουδαίων. πιθανώτατος δ' ἂν καὶ ἔδοξεν ὁ λόγος εἶναι αὐτῷ πρὸς ἡμᾶς γραφόμενος. Ἀλλὰ μή ποτε ὁ πάντ' ἐπαγγελλόμενος εἰδέναι, τὸ ἀκόλουθον οὐκ οἶδε κατὰ τὸν τόπον τῆς προσωποποιίας. p. 56.

of Celsus affords no evidence of his admission of its truth: and though, after this, several passages are produced from Celsus, in which Jewish Christians are charged with worshipping Christ as God, which Origen never denies—still, it may be alleged, we may conclude from this notice at the outset, that the accusation will only be applicable to the great body of *Gentile* Christians².

In order to be convinced of the futility of this objection, we have only to fix our attention on Origen's method of conducting a controversy. It is no part of his character to speak in general terms of the inaccuracy of his opponent, without distinctly specifying the several errors, which fell under his notice. In the second book, which is set apart to correct the mis-statements of Celsus on the subject of Jewish Christians, the slightest misconception of his subject, the most inconsiderable misrepresentation of a matter of fact, or the most trivial inaccuracy of expression seems never to have escaped his censure: he often cites a passage merely for the sake of correcting a trifling error in it; and we may have the utmost assurance, that no gross mis-statement of a matter of fact, of which he was aware, could have escaped a distinct and a severe animadversion. We might even venture to say, that Origen has in *no instance* satisfied himself with speaking in general terms of the inaccuracy of his opponent, without spe-

² We may observe, by the way, that, if this objection were admitted, we should have the testimony of Origen to the belief of *the great body* of *Gentile* Christians of his time in the Divinity of Christ.

cifying particular errors: and, if ever it be possible to explain a part of an author's works by attending to his character, it is unquestionably so in the present case. When he asserts, that the words of Celsus would appear highly credible, if addressed to Gentile Christians, we may be fully convinced, from his character as a disputant, that he means only the words relating to the desertion of the Mosaic Law, which he immediately labours, though not very successfully, to refute at great length.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE INTERPRETATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT, BY THE FIRST JEWISH CHRISTIANS, COLLECTED FROM THEIR RELIGIOUS OPINIONS.

1. Testimony of Sulpicius Severus to the desertion of the Mosaic Law by Jewish Christians. Testimony of Basil and Chrysostom to the conformity, in faith and manners, between Jewish and Gentile Christians. 2. The observance of the ritual law prohibited in the churches, which were partly composed of Jews and partly of Gentiles, about the end of the first century. Judaism probably abandoned by most of the members of the church of Jerusalem about A.D. 136. 3. Opinions of the Jewish Christians in the first century, on the subject of the nature of Christ. Their interpretation of the New Testament collected from their opinions. They must have thought the doctrine of Christ's Divinity very clearly taught by himself and the Apostles.

I. FROM the testimony of Celsus confirmed by the acquiescence of Origen, it appears, that the great body of Jewish Christians in the second century believed in the Divinity of Christ; and, from the united testimonies of both these writers, we also may conclude, that most of them had relinquished all distinctive marks of Judaism, and were not different from Gentile Christians. Several causes, we know, existed sufficient to produce this last effect; and without it, we should be at a loss to account for the disappearance of the Jewish Christians after the first century.

The account given by Celsus and Origen of the desertion of the literal observance of the Mosaic Law

by the Jewish Christians is also confirmed by other writers.

Sulpicius Severus, speaking of the orders of Adrian to drive all Jews from Jerusalem, observes, that “this measure was serviceable to the Christian faith; because at that time nearly all believed Christ to be God with the observance of the law; the Lord so disposing it, that the servitude of the law should be removed from the liberty of the faith and of the church. Then was Mark the first Gentile bishop at Jerusalem¹.”

This measure was serviceable to the Christian faith, because from that time the great body of Hebrew Christians exonerated themselves from the servitude of the Law; by which, as we know from Ignatius, Justin Martyr and Jerom, Christianity was then supposed to suffer degradation.

In perfect conformity with these testimonies, Basil has represented the believing Jews as perfectly similar in their sentiments to the Gentile Christians, and forming with them one uniform body; which could not have been true, if the Jewish Christians had in general been Ebionites—who, long before his time, had not been permitted to rank among Christians.

“A portion of believers in Christ, *has been saved* from the whole of Israel: the election having been found in a few only: which portion acting as leaven

¹ “Quod quidem Christianæ fidei proficiebat; quia tum pene omnes Christum Deum sub legis observatione credebant. Nimirum id Domino ordinante dispositum ut legis servitus a libertate fidei atque ecclesiæ tolleretur. Ita tum primum Marcus ex gentibus apud Hierosolymam episcopus fuit. Hist. L. II. c. xxxi.

to the Gentiles, has drawn them all over to a *resemblance of itself*.”

On this testimony it may be remarked, that, in the time of Basil, the Ebionites had been in a state of excommunication for several ages; excluded, according to the common opinion, from future salvation, and not considered as Christians. No bodies of men could be more dissimilar than the Ebionites and Gentile Christians. When, therefore, he declares, that a portion of believing Israelites was *saved*, and that the Gentile Christians had been brought over to a *resemblance* of them, his testimony to the early existence of other Jewish Christians besides Ebionites is no less decisive than that of Celsus and Origen.

II. By comparing the accounts given of the first Hebrew Christians by the earliest ecclesiastical historians, with the history of the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles of St Paul, in the New Testament, the state of opinion among them, and the changes in their manners may be collected with great probability. At first, they were all rigorous observers of the Law of Moses, and insisted on imposing the same burden on Gentile converts: this made it necessary for the Apostles, and others of the first teachers of Christianity, to insist strongly on the inutility of the ceremonial law: and the Epistle to

² Τὸ μέντοι μέρος τῶν πιστευσάντων εἰς Χριστὸν διεσώθη ἀπὸ τοῦ πάντος τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ· ἐν ὀλίγοις εὐρεθείσης τῆς ἐκλογῆς· ὅπερ ὡς ζῦμη γεγόμενον τοῖς ἔθνεσι, πάντας πρὸς τὴν οἰκείαν ἔλκυσε ὁμοίότητα.
Basil Comm. in Esaiam, p. 396. Ed. Paris. 1721.

the Hebrews appears to have been written for that purpose. In most of the churches before the end of the first century, the spirit of Judaism and the spirit of Christianity were found to be so much at variance, that, when the Epistle of Barnabas was written, the abolition of the literal observance of the Law was regularly taught; and Christians were informed, that an obedience to the precepts of the Gospel was the *true spiritual* observance of the law. "God has manifested to us by all the prophets, that he has no occasion for our sacrifices, or burnt offerings, or oblations; saying, 'To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices, &c¹.' These things therefore *hath God abolished*, that the new law of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is without the yoke of any such necessity, might have an offering becoming men²."—"But why did Moses say, 'Ye shall not eat of the swine, neither the eagle, nor the hawk, nor the crow, &c.?' I answer, that under this outside figure he comprehended three *spiritual* doctrines, that were to be gathered from thence."—"Moses therefore, speaking as concerning meats, delivered indeed three great precepts to them in the *spiritual* signification of those commands. But they, according to the desires of the flesh, understood him, as if he had only meant it of meats³."

At length, about the end of the first century, Judaism was expressly prohibited in the churches, which were composed of Gentiles and Jews. Ignatius (about A. D. 107) declares—"It is absurd to call your-

¹ Isaiah i. 11—14.

² Ep. Barn. § II. Wake's Transl.

³ Sect. x.

selves by the name of Christians and to judaize⁴;" and, "If any one shall preach the Jewish Law unto you, hearken not unto him⁵." At that time, the literal observance of the Mosaic Law was neither tolerated nor entirely abolished: no separate privilege is allowed to Gentile Christians as distinguished from Jews, nor to Jewish Christians as distinguished from Gentiles. The great object of his Epistles is to inculcate uniformity of faith and manners; to worship God in the same place, and in the same manner: and in the Epistles to the Magnesians and Philadelphians, in particular, all Christians, without exception, are warned against Jewish customs.

"I exhort you that ye study to do all things in a divine concord.—Let there be nothing that may be able to make a division among you. But, be ye united to your Bishop, and those who preside over you, to be your pattern and direction in the way to immortality. As therefore the Lord did nothing without the Father being united to him, neither by himself, nor yet by his Apostles; so neither do ye any thing without your Bishop and presbyters: neither endeavour to let any thing appear rational to yourselves apart; but being come together into the same place, have one common prayer; one supplication; one mind; one hope; in charity and in joy undefiled. There is one Lord Jesus Christ, than whom nothing is better. Wherefore, come ye all together as unto one temple of God; as to one

⁴ Epistle to the Magnesians, § x.

⁵ Epistle to the Philadelphians, § vi.

altar; as to one Jesus Christ, who proceeded from one Father; and exists in one, and is returned to one."

"Be not deceived with strange doctrines, nor with old fables, which are unprofitable. For, if we still continue to live according to the Jewish Law, we do confess ourselves not to have received grace¹.—These things, my beloved, I write unto you; not that I know any among you that lie under this error: but, as one of the least among you, I am desirous to forewarn you, that ye fall not into the snares of vain doctrine²."

This was the language in which the Jewish Christians were addressed by the rulers of the Christian church at the end of the first century. The literal observance of their ancient law was at that time as severely reprobated as the strange doctrines of new heresies; and, about thirty years later, such was the general abhorrence of Judaism, that any Christian who professed it, was very commonly supposed to be excluded from salvation³.

The opinion, that every true Christian was a true follower of the ritual law, which had long prevailed among Christians, would have a stronger tendency to induce the Jewish Christians to abandon the laws of their ancestors than the violence of their Gentile brethren; and these causes, joined to others, appear to have produced the effect that might reasonably be expected: for, after the middle of the second century, there are neither any traces of churches

¹ Epistle to the Magnesians. § VI. VII. VIII. Wake's Translation.

² Sect. XI.

³ Justin Martyr, p. 230. et seq. Ed. Thirlby.

composed partly of Jews and partly of Gentiles, like those in the first age of Christianity, nor of Ebionites⁴ existing separate from the churches any where, except in a few⁵ places in the east.

The Jewish Christians must therefore, in general, have abandoned their distinctive customs in most of the Christian churches in the first century, or the beginning of the second: and they would probably be followed in this by most of the members of the church of Jerusalem, after Adrian had prohibited all Jews from approaching the neighbourhood of their native city.

⁴ It is probable, that all the Ebionites, at the end of the second and beginning of the third century, bore no proportion to the number of Jewish Christians in Palestine alone, in the reign of Trajan, after the Rescript of that Emperor in favour of the Christians. Eusebius speaks (hyperbolically, no doubt,) of Justus, one of the Hebrew Bishops, as one of the myriads of those of the circumcision, who believed in Christ. Ἰουδαῖός τις ὄνομα Ἰουστός, μυρίων ὅσων ἐκ περιτομῆς εἰς τὸν Χριστὸν τηρικαῦτα πεπιστευκότων εἰς καὶ αὐτὸς ὢν. Hist. L. III. c. xxxv.

⁵ We must not suppose, that the Nazaræan or Ebionæan Christians existed in many parts of the east, from a confused sentence in Jerom. Quid dicam de Hebionitis, qui Christianos esse se simulant? Usque hodie per totas Orientis synagogas inter Judæos hæresis est quæ dicitur Mineorum, et a Pharisæis nunc usque damnatur, quos vulgo Nazaræos nuncupant, qui credunt in Christum, filium dei, natum de virgine Mariâ, et eum dicunt esse, qui sub Pontio Pilato passus est, et resurrexit, in quem et nos credimus: sed dum volunt et Judæi esse et Christiani, nec Judæi sunt nec Christiani. Opera Tom. i. p. 634. Ed. Lutet. 1624. A very judicious explanation of this passage has not been sufficiently attended to.—The imprecations which the Jews uttered thrice every day in their public prayers against Christians, under the name of Nazarenes, “were composed some years before the destruction of Jerusalem, according to the chronology of Semach David, and were not concealed; but *the empire growing Christian*, the Jews feared they should fall under the lash of the civil power for these their wicked prayers, and therefore pretended, that they meant only a sect of their own, called Nazaræans or Minæans, and imposed so far upon St Jerom as to make him believe them.” Mangey’s Rem. on Nazarenus, p. 7.

The ancient testimonies, by which we prove, what is beforehand in the highest degree probable, are those of Celsus, Origen, and Sulpicius Severus: to whom Basil may also be joined. From the positive testimonies of these writers, joined to the consideration of the disappearance of Jewish Christians in the second century, in most parts of the world where they had existed before, we may conclude with certainty, that they had assimilated themselves to Gentile Christians: and the year 136 has been with great probability assigned as the time, when the secession from the Mosaic ritual took place, among the members of the church of Jerusalem¹.

III. Respecting the opinions of the first Jewish Christians, on the nature of Christ, in most of the churches, of which they soon formed but a small portion, direct and specific testimony is wanting. Two classes of evidence may be just mentioned, which are, however, too general and indeterminate to be of much use on this particular subject. Irenæus, Tertullian, and many others, have expressly declared, that the opinions of the Christian church preceded those of any of the heretics: and it would be unnecessary to mention, had it not been denied by Dr Priestley, that both these writers considered Unitarians as heretics. Others of the Christian fathers, who also reckoned Unitarianism heretical, have affirmed that

¹ Du Fresnoy's Chronological Table, and Echard's Ecclesiastical History under the year 136, and Mosheim de Rebus ante Constantinum, p. 324.

the first ages of the church were free from heresy : by which they plainly meant, that the disseminators of erroneous opinions were very few, when compared with those of later times.

A third class of testimony will apply more immediately to this point. All the ancient Christian historians, who have treated on this subject, have placed the origin of Unitarianism in the second or third age of Christianity, and have mentioned the first individuals by name—(Cerinthus and Carpocrates, with whom some have joined Ebion)—who taught this doctrine, or one nearly allied to it. From their united testimony it is clear, that the great dispute in the first age of Christianity (*viz.* in the first thirty-five years after the crucifixion of Christ) was about the simple Divinity of Christ, not about his simple humanity. The first Gnostic heretics, who were Jews² and Samaritans, contended that Christ was man only in appearance, and that he only seemed to suffer. While the early origin of the sects of this class, the only sects which gave much concern in the second century, is fully admitted, the ancient historians of the church have agreed in placing the first Jewish Unitarians, whose numbers were too inconsiderable to give alarm in any age, towards the end of the first, or the beginning of the second century³.

² "That the authors of heresy in the time of the Apostles were chiefly Jews, is evident from a variety of circumstances." History of early Opinions, Vol. I.

³ "The church was disturbed in its infancy with two opposite heresies, each of which produced several sects. The principal tenets of one, which

The opinions of the Hebrew church of Jerusalem (which may reasonably be considered as a just specimen of the opinions of the Jewish Christians at large) on the nature of Christ, in the first century, are determined by the express testimonies of Hege-sippus, Eusebius and Sulpicius Severus; with these the testimony of Celsus, to the opinions of the Jewish Christians in general, in the middle of the second century, perfectly coincides; the whole is confirmed, were additional authority wanting, by the acquiescence of Origen; and against this body of evidence not a single ancient testimony can be opposed.

Since then "it cannot be doubted but that the primitive Christians really thought that their opinions (whatever they were) were contained in the Scriptures, as these were the standards to which they constantly appealed¹," and by which their opinions were formed; since the Gospel of St Matthew was particularly intended for the use of Hebrew Christians²; and since those who are of the same age and country with a speaker or writer, are the most likely

which came from the Samaritans, and had Simon for its first author, were, that there are two Gods, and two principles, the Creator and another above him, and that our Saviour was man in appearance only. These are they to whom are given in general the names of Gnostics and Docetæ; under which are comprehended *almost all* the sects of the *two first ages*.

The other heresy opposite to this came from the Jews, who embraced Christianity, but not in all its perfection. They owned one principle and one God, and the reality of Christ's human nature. But, they believed him to be no more than man, denied his Divinity, and retained the ceremonies of the law with so much zeal, as to diminish the liberty and glory of the Gospel." Tillemont on Cerinthus.

¹ Priestley's Letter to the Dean of Canterbury, p. 8.

² Euseb. Hist. L. III. c. xxiv.

persons to know the true meaning of words addressed immediately to themselves; we might conclude, even if the New Testament had been totally lost, or grossly corrupted or mutilated, that it originally taught the doctrine of Christ's Divinity.

We may also conclude, that the language of the New Testament on the subject of the Divinity of Christ and the verbal instructions of the Apostles did not appear to the first Hebrew Christians difficult or ambiguous. For, we know the force of that association of ideas depending on *habit* too well, to suppose, that it would have been possible to banish the notions, which they had previously conceived of their Messiah, by words of doubtful import. The Jews had been for some time in expectation of a great deliverer, when our Saviour appeared among them; and their opinions respecting his nature and character had been partly formed on the Old Testament, and partly by their own fancies. They had expected, that he was to be a deliverer of the Jews only; and with such a prejudice as this, they must have been strongly disposed to misinterpret any passage in Scripture (if it appeared to them at all doubtful) which informed them, that he came to save the world. Their Messiah, according to another of their preconceived notions, was to be a temporal prince, and a man; and, under the influence of such an opinion, they must have been inclined to pervert the meaning of passages (if they thought them in any degree obscure) which taught his Divinity.

Jews, if disposed to deviate from the truth at all in the interpretation of the words of Christ and the Apostles, must, on account of their habitual train of thought, have had a strong bias to err on the side of Unitarianism: they could never have been brought to believe their Messiah possessed of a divine nature, unless his words and those of his inspired servants had appeared to them very clear and explicit on this particular subject. If it had been a matter of doubt with the first Hebrew Christians, whether the Divinity or simple humanity of Christ was taught by himself and the Apostles, ancient prejudices would have disposed them to seize the latter opinion; and we should have been informed by ancient historians, that Ebionitism commenced with Christianity itself.

When therefore we know that the dispute, in the first age of Christianity, was between those who maintained the union of the divine and human natures in the person of Christ, and those who insisted on his *simple divinity*, and that the first believers in the *simple humanity* of Christ appeared not till after the destruction of Jerusalem under Vespasian—we may be certain, that, in whatever obscurity the other opinions taught by Christ and his Apostles might be supposed to be involved, the doctrine of his Divinity was thought to be very clearly and plainly inculcated.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE INTERPRETATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT BY THE EBIONITES COLLECTED FROM THEIR RELIGIOUS OPINIONS.

1. Whether the Ebionites and Nazaræans of the second century were two or three sects, a subject of dispute. Singular hypothesis of Dr Priestley, that they were only *one* sect till after the age of Irenæus, and that sect entertaining the same opinions with himself on the subject of the nature of Christ. Dr Priestley's method of collecting the sense of the New Testament on this subject from the opinions of the Ebionites. The principle, by which their interpretation of the New Testament is collected, false. Those among the Ebionites, who had read the New Testament, probably thought it to contain doctrines relating to the nature of Christ *opposite* to their own. Their opinions the representation of doctrines taught in their own canonical books, and not of those of the New Testament.—Consequence of appealing to the opinions of the Ebionites as the just representations of the Doctrines of Christianity. Consequence of appealing to their opinions in order to discover the sense of the New Testament. 2. Toland's attempt to destroy the authority of the New Testament, and Dr Priestley's method of explaining it compared. Summary view of the interpretation of the New Testament. 1. By the Jews. 2. Primitive church of Jerusalem. 3. Ebionites. 4. The greatest part of the New Testament not received by the Ebionites. Summary view of the evidence on this subject.

I. IN an inquiry into the interpretation of the New Testament by the first Jewish Christians, the sense in which it was understood by some of the earliest of those Christians, who were usually called heretics, would be highly valuable, if their interpretation could be made out with any considerable degree of probability: this, however, it would be unreasonable to expect: and we may dismiss the first Gnostics, without much concern about their opinions, because it is not known by what means they were formed.

The opinions of the Ebionites would be less entitled to our notice, as a medium for discovering the sense of the New Testament, than those of the first Gnostics, had not an improper stress been laid on them by a modern writer; who has attempted to establish his own system of religion by the help of a system of historical mistakes.

It has been universally allowed, that a body of Jews professing the Christian religion, and divided into two sects under the name of Ebionites, existed in Palestine at the end of the first or the beginning of the second century. One of these is supposed by many writers to have been sometimes denoted under the title of Nazaræans; while others contend, that the Nazaræans were a sect distinct from both.

Theodoret among the ancients, and Huetius and Spanheim among the moderns, were of the latter opinion; while a great majority of the learned has considered the Nazaræans and those, whom Nicephorus called the lesser Ebionites, as one and the same sect. Of this opinion were Grotius, Vossius, Spencer, Le Clerc, J. Jones, Mosheim¹ and Gibbon.

Each of these two opinions has been supported by arguments of some force: but, in direct opposition to both, the writer, to whom I have alluded, has reduced the three or the two sects to one. He has supposed, without producing any ancient testimony in favour of his hypothesis, and without the countenance of any modern writer, that those, who

¹ Mosheim (*de Rebus ante Constantinum*, p. 330.) has committed a slight mistake in ranking Huetius with Grotius, Vossius and Spencer.

disbelieved the Divinity and miraculous conception of Christ, and who rejected the first two chapters of St Matthew, were the first and only Ebionites; and that they were not divided into two sects till between the times of Irenæus and Origen, at the end of the second, or the beginning of the third century.

This conjecture is founded on the *silence* of Justin and Irenæus respecting any Jewish Christians, except those who believed that Christ was a man born of human parents; though none of the surviving works of Justin are on the subject of heresies; though it is probable enough, from the testimony of Theodoret², that Justin, in his work on heresies, wrote against both Ebionites and Nazaræns; and though the silence of these writers, were it real, could never be opposed against the positive testimony of other authors of credit, who had sufficient means of information.

One of these sects believed in the miraculous conception of Christ; but whether they admitted his Divinity or not, is a matter of doubt. The degree of uncertainty on this subject is very accurately marked by Mosheim³.

They received the Gospel of St Matthew entire, πληρέστατον⁴; and the only fault of their copy, as Le Clerc has observed, was, that it was υπερπλήρες,

² Ταύτας συστήναι τὰς αἱρέσεις Δομετιανοῦ βασιλεύοντος ὁ Ἐυσέβιος εἶρηκε. κατὰ τούτων συνέγραψεν Ἰουστίνος ὁ φιλόσοφος καὶ μάρτυς, καὶ Ἐιρηναῖος, καὶ Ὠριγένης. Theodoret. de Ebionæis et Nazaræis, Hær. Fab. L. II. c. i. 2.

³ De Rebus ante Constantinum, p. 330.

⁴ Epiphanius, Hær. xxix. num. ix.

having been augmented by the temerity of some of their teachers with many interpolations¹. On this account, and because their canon was composed in part of apocryphal books, we cannot collect their interpretation of any part of the New Testament through the medium of their religious opinions—were they even fully known.

The opinions of the other sect are more certainly ascertained; and through them it has lately been attempted to discover the true meaning of Scripture on the subject of the nature of Christ.

It certainly would be interesting to know in what sense the New Testament was understood, either by them or any body of men, who lived near the time when any part of it was written. The first Ebionites were perhaps in existence, when the Apostle John wrote his Gospel; and some ancient writers have asserted, what appears in itself not very unlikely, that some parts of his Epistles were directed against the opinions of the first members of that sect. Both the Greek and Syriac languages were spoken in their country; several of the Ebionites would be competent judges of the meaning of books on the subject of their own religion in either language; and their interpretations of them would form and regulate the opinions of the body at large.

They believed that Christ was a man born of human parents; and it has lately been taken for granted, that they supposed this doctrine taught in

¹ See Jones on the Canon, Part II. c. xxv—xxix. and Fabricius, *Codex Apocryphus*, Vol. I. p. 355.

Scripture, viz. in the Gospel of St John and the other parts of the New Testament²; and it has in the next place been concluded, that no doctrine at variance with this can be taught in Scripture.

The writers, by whom these inferences have been drawn, have sometimes been rather ostentatious in formal declarations of the principles, on which their investigations have been conducted. When we see in some of their books a train of maxims of historical criticism laid down with a regularity, like that of the postulates and axioms in Geometry, we are led to imagine, that nothing short of mathematical accuracy will be found in their reasoning, and that truth, and truth only, will result in their conclusions. It were to be wished, that they had mentioned on what principle of historical criticism they have proceeded in the case now before us. As they have neglected this, it may not be unseasonable to point out what they have omitted. The principle, on which they have tacitly, and perhaps inadvertently, proceeded is this—"that men must suppose their own opinions contained in books, to whose authority they do *not* submit." "The Ebionites must have believed the books, whose authority they did *not* acknowledge, to have contained their opinions." It is entirely on

² "I have shown that the doctrine of the simple humanity of Christ was received by the great body of the primitive Christians both *Jews* and *Gentiles*. *They were in possession of the books of the New Testament, and for their use they were written*; and yet they saw in them no such doctrine as that of the creation of the world by Christ, or even that of his pre-existence." Fourth Letter to Dr Price, in "Defence of Unitarianism for 1787—1790."

this principle, that the Ebionitish interpretation of the New Testament has been lately founded, and recommended to Christians of the present age, as one of the best means for discovering the meaning of the passages in it relating to the nature of Christ.

As the principle is beyond measure extravagant, the errors which have flowed from it cannot excite our surprise. A more reasonable principle would have led, with some degree of probability, to an opposite conclusion. It might have been laid down as rather probable, that the Ebionites supposed the books, whose authority they did not, like other Christians, regularly acknowledge, to have contained doctrines opposite to their own.

The passages of the New Testament, in which the Divinity of Christ is commonly supposed to be most clearly taught, are in the Gospel of St John. This Gospel, whose authority was always acknowledged by every church, and even by a vast majority of those Christians who were called heretics, was not admitted into the canon of the Ebionites: and, therefore, it is rather probable that they believed it to contain doctrines contrary to their opinions.

The Gospels of Luke and Mark are also very commonly thought to teach the Divinity of Christ, though less clearly than the Gospel of John. These Gospels, which have also been always acknowledged as of divine authority by all Christian churches, were never received by the Ebionites: at least, the Gospel of St Luke was never acknowledged by any of this class of Christians: and therefore it is in some degree pro-

bable, that they interpreted these books as they are understood by us.

The Gospel of St Matthew is commonly supposed to teach the Divinity of Christ: both the miraculous conception and Divinity are generally believed to be taught in the first two chapters. This Gospel has been always received entire by the Christian church: those Ebionites, however, who disbelieved both these doctrines, rejected the whole of the first two chapters, and corrupted and mutilated the remainder; and the first words, of the only Gospel whose authority they acknowledged, contain an historical falsehood¹. It is highly probable, therefore, that

¹ "The Ebionites made no public use of any other Gospel than that of Matthew; though they might easily have had the other Gospels and the rest of the books of the New Testament translated for their use; and it appears from Jerom, who saw that Gospel as used by them, that it was not exactly the same with our copies. It is well known, that their copies of Matthew's Gospel *had not* the story of the miraculous conception; and they also *added* to the history such circumstances as they thought sufficiently authenticated." History of early Opinions, Vol. i.

"The Ebionites being Jews, and, in general, acquainted with their own language only, made use of no other than a Hebrew Gospel, which is commonly said to have been that of Matthew originally composed in their language. This I think highly probable from the almost unanimous testimony of antiquity." Hist. of early Opinions, Vol. III. p. 212.

Compare this with the extract from the Letter to Dr Price, p. 207. of this Volume.

"The beginning of their Gospel runs thus: 'It came to pass in the days of Herod, the king of Judæa, that John came baptizing, &c.' Ἡ δὲ ἀρχὴ τοῦ παρ' αὐτοῖς Εὐαγγελίου ἔχει, ὅτι ἐγένετο ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις Ἡρώδου τοῦ βασιλέως τῆς Ἰουδαίας, ἦλθεν Ἰωάννης βαπτίζων, &c." Epiphan. Hær. xxx. 3, 13.

Now, "Herod the king of Judæa was certainly dead above twenty years before John the Baptist began his ministry (See Josephus and the Chronologists), and yet Dr Priestley (Hist. of early Opin. Vol. iv. p. 77, &c. p. 105, &c.) is inclined to prefer this Ebionitish Gospel to the genuine one of St Matthew!" Parkhurst, p. 42.

the Gospel of St Matthew was understood by the Ebionites as it is understood by us; that they believed it to contain the doctrine of the Divinity of Christ; that on this account they rejected the first two chapters, and mutilated and corrupted the remainder.

The Divinity of Christ and the inutility of the ceremonial law are both thought to be taught in St Paul's Epistles, which form a considerable part of the New Testament: the Ebionites, who were believers in the simple humanity of Christ and observers of the law, rejected¹ these Epistles; and the necessary inference is, that they believed one of these doctrines at least to have place in them. Instead of the genuine history of the Acts of the Apostles, in which St Paul is a principal agent, they had some spurious memoirs of their own²: and it is not certainly known whether they received any part of the New Testament, except the Gospel of St Matthew, which in their hands had undergone a complete metamorphosis. And yet an appeal has been seriously made to the opinions of the Ebionites, as the true representations of doctrines taught in books which they never acknowledged.

The authority and the authenticity of the New Testament have been proved beyond all question by writers³, whose arguments stand, at this moment, unrefuted. This book, which has been proved to be

¹ Origen cont. Celsum, L. v. p. 274.

² Epiphanius, Hær. xxx. 16.

³ J. Jones, Lardner, Michaelis, Bryant, Paley.

the true and the only deposit of the doctrines of Christianity, lies open before us: men of plain understanding and common information are enabled by ordinary helps to discover its meaning: but instead of looking directly at the book, they are recommended to turn to the creed of the Ebionites, as a sort of reflector, in which the images of the doctrines of the New Testament are to be more clearly and distinctly viewed than the doctrines themselves by direct inspection. On examining, however, into the construction of this new panorama, a palpable deception is discovered: some of the visionary figures, which it presents to our view, are not representations of any thing contained in the New Testament, as we were informed⁴, but are the reflected pictures of other objects substituted by fraud or inadvertence in its place.

We can only look to the opinions of the Ebionites, as the representations of doctrines contained in their own books, not in ours: an appeal can only be made to *them*, in order to discover the sense of the books, by which their opinions were formed: and these were not the genuine Gospels of St Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, the Acts of the Apostles, and the Epistles written by the Apostles to the first Christian churches; but the Gospel according to the Hebrews, some counterfeit memoirs of the Acts of the Apostles⁵, the Clementine Recognitions⁶, the pre-

⁴ See the extract from the Letter to Dr Price, p. 207.

⁵ Epiphanius, Hær. xxx. 13, 15, 23.

⁶ Grabe, Spicilegium Patrum, Tom. I. p. 57.

tended Epistle of Peter to James¹ and some other forgeries: all which have long since been proved to be spurious, and none of which were ever of any authority in the primitive Christian church.

It has happened by one of those curious inconsistencies, which are sometimes observable in human conduct, that the persons, who at present clamour most loudly against the admission of any creed among Christians, except the New Testament, should affirm that the sense of this book, on one of the most important doctrines of our religion, is to be settled by the unwritten creed of the Ebionites.

It undoubtedly must have happened, that in the progress of his great work Dr Priestley lost sight of the object for which it was commenced. His original design is fairly stated in his own words. "The proper object of my work is to ascertain what must have been the sense of the books of scripture from the sense in which they were actually understood by those for whose use they were composed²." *This* was a reasonable purpose: but instead of pointing out the sense of scripture by the interpretation of those for whose use it was designed; he collects its doctrines by the opinions of those who never used it; and he might have as reasonably appealed to the opinion of a Mahometan, as to that of an Ebionite, to discover the doctrines contained in our four Gospels.

¹ Fabricius, Codex Apocryphus, Tom. II. p. 910. Grabe, Spicileg. Tom. I. pp. 59, 60. Dodwell, Dissert. VI. in Irenæum, § 10.

² Letter to Parkhurst.

Religion admits not of temporizing. It is necessary to see to what this new principle will lead: and, if it be just, to admit all its consequences. Are we to appeal to the opinions of the Ebionites, as just representations of the doctrines of Christianity? We must admit then the authority of their canonical books, by which those opinions were formed; and neglect our own, which they neglected. Or, are we to appeal to their opinions (as it has been lately recommended) in order only to discover their interpretation of our canon of Scripture on the subject of the Divinity or the simple humanity of Christ? If their opinions must decide on this question, we must necessarily conclude, that the simple humanity of Christ was taught in their own books, and his Divinity in ours, to whose authority they refused to submit, in common with other Christians. And thus the Ebionites themselves will destroy the spurious system, which has been defended by their authority and name, but to which they never gave their approbation.

Had an Ebionite been asked, if the simple humanity of Christ was taught in the Gospel of St John, he would probably have replied, that his brethren had been prevailed on by some of their leaders not to acknowledge the authority of that Gospel, because it very clearly inculcated the doctrines of Christ's Divinity and pre-existence, which they thought impossible; and he would have been struck with amazement at an appeal being made to *his* opinions as the proper representations of doc-

trines taught in books, which he had either not read, or not approved.

Let a case be supposed among the Mahometans, similar to that which has lately astonished the Christian world. A collection of writings termed the Koran now regulates the faith of the Mussulmans. Let us imagine a philosopher of Constantinople, of high reputation, really persuading himself, that all the passages in it, on some particular subject, are of doubtful signification; that, on considering the general spirit of this book, it is uncertain, for instance, whether Mahomet intended to declare himself a prophet, or not. To remove this doubt, he appeals to the *opinions* of the faithful in the time of the disciples or immediate successors of Mahomet himself: but instead of directing his attention to those of that age, who received the whole book, and whose tenets were formed on what they conceived to be its precepts, he discovers an extremely small sect, hidden in an obscure corner of the Mahometan dominions, which would scarcely have been heard of, in modern times, had it not been dignified with the name of an heresy. Though Mahometan historians are not agreed about the very year when this sect first appeared, they have, however, without exception, placed its origin about half a century, or rather more, after the death of their great Prophet. The religious opinions of this obscure and despised body of men were regulated by a set of spurious compositions, which some of their leaders had the address to impose on them; and

they received only one small part of the Koran, which they had interpolated and garbled at pleasure. By a bold fiction, the philosopher supposes, in contradiction to the historians, that the members of this sect were the very first Mahometans; and confidently appeals to their religious tenets as a proper medium for discovering the sense of a book, which they never received. If this method of settling the meaning of the Koran had ever been proposed, not a single *Turk* would have been found, who could have endured for a moment the solemn trifling of the philologer, who could gravely project so preposterous an attempt.

We do not refer to the readers of Plato, in order to discover the sense of the writings of Xenophon on the subject of Socrates: we are not to collect the meaning of the history of Cyrus written by Herodotus from the opinions of men, who have only read the romance of Xenophon on the life of that prince: and we cannot appeal to the Ebionites, the readers of the gospel according to the Hebrews, as the proper method of ascertaining what the four Evangelists and the other Apostles have taught on the subject of the nature of Christ.

II. It is now almost forgotten, though the circumstance happened no longer since than the beginning of this century, that the opinions of the Ebionites were once consulted for a very different purpose. A writer of that time attempted to destroy the authority of the New Testament by precisely the same means, which have lately been employed

to discover its true meaning. To accomplish this purpose, he proceeded by these steps:—The first converts to Christianity were of the Jewish race, and received their doctrines from Christ himself and his Apostles; theirs therefore was the genuine, as it was the original, Christianity. He then tacitly took for granted, that the doctrines and sacred books of the Ebionites, in the second, third and fourth centuries, were the same with those of the primitive Jewish Christians: from which it followed, that these were Unitarians, that the gospel according to the Hebrews contained the genuine doctrines of Christianity, and that our canon is therefore of no authority¹. This was the conclusion at which Toland aimed, without troubling himself about concealing his sentiments under much disguise. And, if the premises of his reasoning be true, the conclusion is inevitable: it is the only legitimate consequence of an appeal to the creed of the Ebionites.

Dr Priestley—setting out from the same point, supposing (without venturing, like Toland, openly to assert) that theirs was the original and genuine Christianity, and reasoning as if they had received our canon, instead of one totally different from ours—concludes that they must have thought it to contain their opinions², and therefore that no doctrine at

¹ "Since the Nazarenes or Ebionites are by all Church-Historians unanimously acknowledged to have been the first Christians," &c. Toland's *Nazarenus*, p. 76. This was certainly rather strong assertion; but it was necessary for the author's purpose.

² "It cannot be doubted but that the primitive Christians really thought that their opinions, whatever they were, were contained in the Scriptures, as these were the standard to which they constantly appealed.

variance with Unitarianism can be found in it. It will hereafter be mentioned, as a striking inconsistency in the ecclesiastical history of these our times, that the present century should open with a weak and almost pitiable attempt to *destroy* the authority of the New Testament, by appealing to the creed of the Ebionites, and that the century should close with a still weaker attempt to *explain it* by an appeal to the very same creed.

An acknowledgement of the superior authority of the opinions of the Ebionites necessarily led to the admission of the superior authority of their sacred books: the supposition, of their opinions being the proper representations of the doctrines of Christianity, implied the acknowledgement of the gospel according to the Hebrews as the true deposit of those doctrines. This was clearly seen by Toland: and though only some fragments of this book have survived the neglect of the primitive Christians and the wreck of time, yet the Mahometans, as he asserted, having among them a book called the Gospel of Barnabas, in which St Paul is vilified, and the simple humanity of Christ taught, both on the Ebionæan system, he recommended it to the attention of Christians, as of superior authority to our Gospels³, and as a proper substitute for the gospel according to the Hebrews.

When you say therefore of what I have written, as you choose to express it, 'in four large volumes, concerning the Jews and the Gnostics and the *Ebionites and the Nazarenes*'——— that all this will fall directly to pieces, your conclusion is rather too hasty." Letters to the Dean of Canterbury, p. 8.

³ Nazarenus, p. 69.

However absurd this may appear to us, it is the reasonable consequence of an admission of the Ebionæan authority. The gospel, which, according to this writer's account¹, the Mahometans acknowledge, contains the doctrines, by which the sacred books of the Ebionites were distinguished: and, it is certainly true, that the Mahometan and Ebionæan opinions respecting the nature and character of Christ are nearly the same. The Mahometans agree in part with the milder sect, which believed that Christ was born of a virgin²; that he, no less than Moses, was a great teacher and prophet; that he was the Messiah predicted by the prophets; and that he had received a commission from God to reform and instruct the world; but, that he was only a man.

If, therefore, their opinions are to be considered as the standard of Christianity, the different nations of Mahometans are unquestionably truer Christians (as far as doctrines are concerned in constituting our religion) than the greater part of that body of mankind, to which this name has been exclusively annexed; and, instead of projecting their conversion, Christians themselves ought to be converted to the Christianity of the Turks. The author of Nazarenus was not remarkable for winking at the consequences

¹ "I will venture to affirm, that though the Mahometans do acknowledge a Gospel to have been formerly sent from heaven to Jesus, whom, by the way, they suppose to be the only writer of it, yet they allow that Gospel has no force or authority, they produce no testimonies from it, nor do any of them read it as a sacred book." Mangey on Nazarenus, p. 24.

² In the Alcoran he is always called the son of Mary.

which flowed from his own principles; and he made no attempt to conceal this. He thought highly of the purity of the faith of the Unitarian Christians of his time; and he probably intended it as no mean encomium on them, when he declared, that their Christianity almost entirely coincided with that of the Mahometans, or that of the Ebionites: which, he observed, were one and the same.

After having described *the Christianity* and the Gospel of the *Mahometans*, he characterized both in a short summary in these words. “’Tis in short the ancient Ebionite or Nazarene system; and agrees in every thing almost with the scheme of our modern Unitarians. It is not, I believe, without sufficient grounds, that I have represented them (the Mahometans) as a sort of Christians; and not the worst sort neither, though far from being the best³.” From another passage, however, in this author, and from the general spirit of his book, we might conclude that he considered them as the best Christians. “You perceive,” he says, “by this time, that what Mahometans believe concerning Christ and his doctrines, were neither the inventions of Mahomet, nor yet of those monks, who are said to have assisted him in framing his Alcoran; but, that *they are as old as the time of the Apostles*, having been the sentiments of whole sects or churches; and that, though the Gospel of the Hebrews be in all probability lost, yet some of those things are founded on another Gospel anciently known, and still in some manner

³ Preface to Nazarenes, p. 3.

existing, attributed to Barnabas. If in the history of this Gospel (of Barnabas) I have satisfied your curiosity, I shall think my time well spent; but, infinitely better, if you agree that on this occasion I have set *the original plan of Christianity* in its due light."

This is *one* of the consequences of an appeal to the opinions of the Ebionites. To guard against such absurdities—to prevent ignorant persons from being misled by the fictitious authority of pretended traditions, by the forgeries of ancient, and the no less gross impostures of modern times—it has long since been proved by critical arguments, and it is now admitted and insisted on by Christians of every denomination, that the New Testament is the genuine and the only deposit of the doctrines of Christianity. This book is generally thought to teach the Divinity of Christ very clearly. A few Christians, however, think differently: and in support of their opinion, they have lately professed to appeal to the valuable interpretation of the first Christians contemporary with the Apostles, as one of the means by which the sense of Scripture on the subject of the nature of Christ may be determined with certainty. The interpretation of any book by contemporaries is truly valuable, either in ascertaining the sense of doubtful passages, or in confirming the meaning of others. We may admit the appeal to the contemporaries of Christ and his Apostles with confidence; and have only to request, that those, by whom it has been brought forward, will not shrink from the de-

cision of the judges, whose sentence they have drawn down on themselves.

We may appeal to three bodies of Jewish people contemporaries of Christ, or of some of his Apostles, who had heard or read some of the words of the New Testament. 1. The Unbelieving Jews. 2. The primitive church of Jerusalem, before its destruction under Adrian. 3. The Ebionites, (since their authority has been insisted on,) who began to exist about the time of the publication of St John's Gospel.

The interpretation of several passages in the New Testament, relating to the nature of Christ, by the unbelieving Jews, is proved *directly* by the most decisive testimony of four contemporary historians: who have related that the Jews, at different times, attempted to destroy Jesus Christ, and at last accomplished their purpose, because he, as they alleged, being a man, made himself God, by calling himself the Son of God, and assuming privileges and powers, which, as they thought, belonged to God only.

The interpretation of the words of Christ and his Apostles by the primitive church of Jerusalem, though not proved directly, is collected with very great probability through the medium of their religious opinions, as described by the only ancient historians, who have expressly treated on them, and whose accounts are confirmed by the collateral testimony of others, without being opposed by any ancient testimony whatever. This church, according to their representation, believed in the Divinity of Christ:

“ Pene omnes Christum Deum sub legis observatione credebant.”

The interpretation of the New Testament by the Ebionites, of whatever value it may be, is also not proved directly, but is collected through the medium of their religious opinions. By comparing two historical facts, the sense in which they understood the New Testament may be inferred with a considerable degree of probability. The first of these facts, their belief in the simple humanity of Christ, is fully established by the general testimony of historians; the second, which is as fully ascertained as the other, is their refusal to submit, with other Christians, to the authority of nearly the whole of the New Testament. The probable inference, which must be drawn from the combination of these two circumstances, is obviously this—that they believed it to contain the doctrines of the miraculous conception and Divinity of Christ, which they disapproved. The probability of this conclusion is increased by the consideration, that in the Gospels there were no other doctrines (whatever the Epistles of St Paul might contain) which could be obnoxious to Jewish Christians.

III. In attempting to collect the probable interpretation of the Ebionites, I have reasoned on the common supposition (which is admitted by Dr Priestley) of the greater part of the New Testament forming no part of their canon. The evidence, on which the opinion is founded, stands thus:—Some ancient writers have related, that they considered St Paul

as an Apostate, and rejected both his epistles¹, and the history of the Acts of the Apostles², in which he is a principal agent. Several ancient writers also, so far from countenancing the notion of the Ebionites taking any of their opinions from the Gospel of St John, have positively declared, that this Evangelist wrote against the errors of the Ebionites and Cerinthians. And, according to the united testimony of several ancient historians, they used the Gospel according to the Hebrews, *i.e.* a mutilated and corrupt copy of St Matthew's Gospel only. Irenæus says, "They use only the Gospel according to St Matthew³:" Eusebius, "Using only the Gospel according to the Hebrews⁴, they made little account of the others." When Epiphanius reports that they received the New Testament, he explains himself by declaring, that "the Ebionites receive the Gospel according to St Matthew: for this both they and the Cerinthians use, and no other⁵." And, according to Theodoret, "They (the Ebionites, who denied the miraculous conception) receive the Gospel according

¹ Irenæus, L. i. c. xxvi. Eusebius, Hist. L. iii. c. 27. Origen contra Celsum. L. v. prope finem.

² Epiphanius, Hær. xxx. 16.

³ "Solo autem eo, quod est secundum Matthæum, evangelio utuntur." Iren. L. i. c. xx.

⁴ Εὐαγγελίῳ δὲ μόνῳ τῇ καθ' Ἑβραίους λεγομένῳ χρώμενοι, τῶν λοιπῶν συμκρόν ἐποιούντο λόγον. Euseb. Hist. L. iii. 27.

⁵ Δέχονται μὲν καὶ αὐτοὶ τὸ κατὰ Ματθαῖον εὐαγγέλιον. τουτῷ γὰρ καὶ αὐτοὶ ὡς καὶ οἱ κατὰ Κήρινθον χρώνται μόνῳ. καλοῦσι δὲ αὐτὸ κατὰ Ἑβραίους. Epiph. Hær. xxx. 3.

Ἐν τῇ γοῦν παρ' αὐτοῖς Εὐαγγελίῳ κατὰ Ματθαῖον ὀνομαζομένῳ, ρύχ' ὅλην δὲ πληρεστάτην, ἀλλὰ νενοθευμένην, καὶ ἡκρωτηριασμένην, Ἑβραϊκὸν δὲ τοῦτο καλοῦσιν. Hær. xxx. 13.

to the Hebrews only;" and "They (the Ebionites, who believed in the miraculous conception) use the Gospel according to Matthew only¹."

To this no ancient testimony whatever is opposed²: and the only circumstance, which can raise a doubt on the subject, is that of the citations from the other Gospels in the Clementine Homilies and Recognitions; the first of which are generally thought to have been the composition of an Ebionite of the second century; and the two works, which have been so much interpolated, that reasoning on them is, at the most, only groping in the dark, are very commonly supposed to have been originally one and the same. These citations furnished Lardner with an argument for supposing, that *one* of the branches of the Ebionites either received the four Gospels, or one compiled from them.

"*If this be the work of an Ebionite, as is generally supposed³, and seems not improbable⁴, it may*

¹ Μόνον δὲ τὸ κατὰ Ἑβραίους εὐαγγέλιον δέχονται.

Εὐαγγελίῳ δὲ τῷ κατὰ Ματθαῖον κεχρῆνται μόνῳ. Theodoret. Hær. Fab. L. II. c. i.

² Marius Mercator indeed (A.D. 430) mentions, that Ebion made use of the authority of St Mark and St Luke, as well as that of St Matthew, (Merc. in Nest. p. 128. § xiv.) But, this only proves that Ebion (if a person of that name ever existed) might refer to those Evangelists, as an authority to which the generality of Christians submitted, though he would not allow it himself: in the same manner as Cerinthus and Carpocrates appealed to the first two chapters of St Matthew. Epiphan. Hær. xxx. 14. We may observe, by the way, that according to these accounts the most important parts of the New Testament were referred to by heretics, in the first twenty or thirty years after they are stated to have been written.

³ Vid. Præfat. Clerici. et judicium Cotelarii de Clementinis, apud Patres Apost. Mill. Proleg. 670.

⁴ Vid. Hom. III. § xii. 7. § viii. 16. § xv. et alibi.

be argued, that, when the author wrote, the four Gospels were owned by that sect—or, at least, *by some branch of it*. For though there may be some interpolations in these homilies, there is no reason to think that any texts have been added. If such a thing had been attempted, we should have had here some passages out of other books of the New Testament, and possibly out of St Paul's epistles. It is very probable also that we should have met with some forms of quotation, different from those now used in these homilies. I see no way of evading this conclusion, but by supposing that all these texts of our several Gospels were in some one Gospel used by the Ebionites, called the Gospel of St Matthew, or according to the Hebrews, or by whatever other name it was distinguished. However, either way our evangelical history is confirmed⁵." This argument, which is stated by its venerable author with his usual caution, must, I think, be allowed to stand on too weak and uncertain grounds to be opposed against the very strong and united testimony of Christian antiquity; and even admitting all its force, it would prove nothing respecting that sect of Ebionites, by whose opinions Dr Priestley attempts to discover the sense of the New Testament.

The ancient testimonies, relative to the books of the Ebionites, are too consistent and clear to be set aside by the Clementine Homilies. But, even supposing that the testimonies on one side, relating to

⁵ Lardner's Credibility of the Gospel History, Part II. c. xxix. Vol. II. p. 358. Ed. Kippis.

both sects of Ebionites, were nearly balanced by the citations in the Homilies on the other, and that it were a matter of extreme uncertainty, on comparing these opposite evidences, whether those who believed Christ to be a mere man born of human parents, received the four Gospels, or not: who, in this case would attempt, with Dr Priestley, to collect the meaning of the New Testament through the medium of their opinions? Either their opinions are of no use whatever in leading us to their interpretation of the New Testament, or the probable inference from them is that which I have just deduced.

CHAPTER XV.

THE INTERPRETATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT, BY THE FIRST GENTILE CHRISTIANS, COLLECTED FROM THEIR RELIGIOUS OPINIONS.

1. Observations on the interpretation of the words of the New Testament. (1) By the Jews. (2) The great body of Jewish Christians. (3) The Ebionites. (4) The Gentile Christians. 2. Claim of Simon Magus to identity with Christ. To support this claim, he judged it necessary to assert his own Divinity. The first Gnostical sects denied the human nature of Christ altogether. Correction of their errors by the Sacred Writers and the Apostolical Fathers. In correcting the errors of those, who contended for the simple Divinity of Christ, the Apostles and primitive Fathers must sometimes have asserted that Christ was a man *only*, if they had intended to teach the doctrine of his simple humanity. No declaration to this effect is to be found in the New Testament; or in *any* Christian writing in the first century after the establishment of Christianity.

I. IN order to ascertain the sense of disputed passages in Scripture, and to confirm the meaning of others, it is of considerable importance to know how they were understood by persons, who lived in or near the age, when they were written. The interpretation of the words of our Saviour by the unbelieving Jews, who heard him speak in their own language, is in itself highly valuable in establishing their real meaning. The interpretation of the precepts of Christ and the Apostles by the primitive church of Jerusalem, and other Jewish Christians, collected with considerable probability from the religious opinions of that church, as described by the only writers, who have treated on the subject, deserves also much attention. And the sense, in which the New Testament was understood by the indivi-

duals, who had the influence to mislead the small sects, which appeared in a part of Syria, about the end of the first century, under the name of Ebionites, is not to be totally disregarded.

We should attend to them, as we would attend to a number of ancient versions, or paraphrases of the New Testament, composed in the age of the Apostles, by men who perfectly understood the language, comprehended the design, and entered into the spirit of the original: and their concurrence, if all or most of them agree in exhibiting the same sense, on any one topic, will point out the truth with moral certainty.

To us the interpretation of the New Testament by the first Gentile Christians would be very important, if it could be clearly ascertained. And though the history of Christianity in the first century is involved in great obscurity, it will not, however, be a matter of great difficulty to determine, with a very high degree of probability at least, the opinions of the Christians of that period on the particular subject of the nature of Christ.

II. The writings in or near the first century, which are to be consulted in order to discover the opinions of the first Gentile Christians, are the Scriptures of the New Testament, the five Apostolical Fathers, and the works of a few heathen writers.

The New Testament is commonly supposed to teach the Divinity of Christ; but this cannot be taken for granted at present; as it is the point,

which we are aiming to prove, by means of the interpretation of contemporaries. One observation, however, even in this inquiry, may be extended not only to the writings of the first Christian Fathers, but also to the New Testament.

Soon after the Apostles had retired from Jerusalem to Samaria, a Samaritan appears to have conceived the design of personating Christ, who had just been crucified. He knew that our Saviour had worked miracles of a very different nature from the delusive tricks, which he had himself practised; he saw the same beneficent and stupendous works wrought by the Apostles, without knowing by what means they were performed; and desirous to be possessed of the qualification suitable to the character, which, even at that time, he perhaps began to think of assuming, he attempted to purchase with money a power, which God alone could bestow¹.

While this impostor continued with the Apostles, he would unquestionably learn something of what Christ had taught respecting his own nature; and would, without doubt, regulate his pretensions in some degree by those of the person, whose name he assumed: though both the foundation and superstructure of his scheme consisted in falsehood, yet to prevent the imposture from appearing too palpable, a certain mixture of truth must necessarily have been called in to his assistance.

If he knew, that Christ had asserted his own Divinity, he would probably think it necessary to

¹ Acts viii. 13. 18.

advance the same claim: and, if he had learnt from the Apostles, that Christ had declared himself a man only, he would certainly not call himself God. Now, when Simon Magus pretended, that Christ had reappeared in his person, he declared, that he had first manifested himself in Judea as God the Son; where he only seemed to suffer; that he now appeared in Samaria as God the Father, and would visit other nations as the Holy Ghost¹. From this historical fact, without any reference to the New Testament, had the Gospels even never been written, we might conclude with some probability, that Christ himself had claimed Divinity, and taught the doctrine of the Trinity in unity in some sense or other. When, therefore, we read in the Gospels the words of Christ, "I and my Father are one"²—"Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost"³—we meet with nothing more than what we were prepared by common history to expect. This coincidence would be at once both a strong argument in favour of the genuineness of these parts of the gospel history (were there any want of such evidence) and of the sense, in which they are commonly understood.

¹ "Hic igitur a multis quasi Deus glorificatus est, et docuit semetipsum esse, qui inter Judæos quidem quasi Filius apparuerit, in Samariâ autem quasi Pater descenderit, in reliquis vero gentibus quasi Spiritus Sanctus adventaverit." Irenæus, L. i. c. xxiii. See also the Appendix to Tertullian de Præscrip. Eusebius. L. ii. c. xiii. Epiphani. Hær. xxi. 1. Theodoret. Hær. Fab. L. i. c. i.

² John x. 30.

³ Matthew xxviii. 19.

The claims of Simon Magus were advanced before many of the books of the New Testament were written; and were so far crowned with success, that he received divine honours among the Samaritans⁴. Mosheim has observed that he has always been improperly termed a heretic; but though he was a false Messiah, it is with great propriety also that he has always been represented as the father of heretical opinions⁵: as both the Gnosticism of the first and second centuries, and the Sabellianism of the third, were first marked out by this impostor. He affirmed that Christ only seemed to suffer: and while he and the first Gnostical sects denied our Lord's humanity, they at once set aside the doctrine of atonement, and rejected the notion of a resurrection. All these errors were corrected with great care by the Apostles. The reality of our Lord's human body⁶, his sufferings on the cross, and the atonement for the sins of the world by his death, are clearly taught in the New Testament, and are also repeatedly insisted on by the first Christian writers after the Apostles. To counteract the doctrines of those, who maintained the simple Divinity and impassibility of Christ, it was necessary

⁴ Καὶ σχεδὸν πάντες μὲν Σαμαρεῖς, ὀλίγοι δὲ καὶ ἐν ἄλλοις ἔθνεσιν, ὡς τὸν πρῶτον θεὸν ἐκείνον ὁμολογοῦντες. Justin M. p. 40. Ed. Thirlby.

⁵ It was not Simon, but his followers, after his time (See Origen, cont. Celsum, L. v. p. 272.) who denied Jesus to be the Son of God. He, at first, supported his claim of Divinity by pretending to identity with Christ. This temporary expedient was laid aside by the Simonians after his age.

⁶ "For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh." 2 Ep. John 7.

to declare that the salvation of mankind was effected by the suffering of the *man* Christ Jesus¹. But, though the principal tenet of the Gnostics was that of the Divinity of Christ, it is no where asserted either in the Apostolical Fathers or in the New Testament, most of which was written after these erroneous opinions had prevailed, that Jesus Christ was a man *only*. Not a single expression to this effect can be found either in the New Testament, or in the writings of the five Fathers of the first century.

The omission of a plain and full declaration to this purpose, *under such circumstances*, seems to prove decidedly, that they never intended any such notion to be collected from their writings. When men are combating one error, they often inadvertently use language bordering on an error of an opposite sort. When the sacred writers and the first Fathers had to combat the notion of the simple Divinity of Christ, it would not have been a matter of wonder, if the latter had seemed to insist on his simple humanity: this, however, is not the case: and it would be a question not easily decided, whether the divine or the human nature of Christ is most frequently and clearly inculcated in the New Testament, and the writings of the Apostolical Fathers.

When St John wrote his Epistles and Gospel, the notion of the simple Divinity of Christ had been a long-established, a general and a dangerous error. Had the Evangelist been conscious of his Master's

¹ Rom. v.—1 Cor. xv.—1 Tim. ii.

mere humanity, the circumstances of the times positively required of him to declare explicitly, that Jesus was only a man like ourselves: whereas his Gospel is generally supposed to teach the Divinity of Christ with more clearness than any other part of the New Testament.

The same observation may be extended to Clemens Romanus, Hermas, Barnabas, Ignatius and Polycarp. Though all these writers were loudly called on by the crying error of the times, which some of them opposed too with the most fervent zeal, not one of them has declared, that Christ was a man *only*. On the contrary, in the writings of three out of the five, the Divinity and pre-existence of Christ are expressly taught: and it is at least probable, that Clemens and Polycarp have also delivered the same doctrines in the short compass of their Epistles.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE INTERPRETATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT, BY THE FIRST GENTILE CHRISTIANS, COLLECTED FROM THEIR RELIGIOUS OPINIONS.

1. Observations on the authority of the Apostolical Fathers, and Dr Priestley's use of them. 2. The Divinity of Christ taught by Barnabas. 3. By Hermas. 4. By Clemens Romanus. External testimony to the religious opinions of Clemens. 5. The Divinity of Christ taught in the genuine Epistles of Ignatius. Summary view of the controversy relating to these Epistles from Parkhurst. Wakefield's argument to prove them corrupted. Examination of this argument. 6. Dr Priestley's objection. 7. Pearson's arguments not invalidated by the answer of Larroque. Larroque refuted by other writers. Acknowledgement of Le Clerc. 8. Ignatius a believer in the Divinity of Christ—proved by external and internal evidence. 9. The religious opinions of Polycarp identified with those of Irenæus, his scholar.

I. BEFORE a regular inquiry be made into the opinions of the Apostolical Fathers, and their testimony to the sentiments of Christians in general of their age; it is necessary to consider, whether the evidence contained in their writings be of any value, or not. The author, on whom I have had frequent occasion to animadvert, has adopted a most singular mode of conduct towards these writings. He has frequently appealed to them in support of his own opinions¹; and at the same time has refused to submit to the conclusions deduced from them by his opponents². This equivocation is intolerable. If he

¹ Letters to the Archdeacon of St Alban's, Part II. pp. 47—54. History of early Opinions, Vol. I. p. 258. and 195.

² "The works that are ascribed to them (the Apostolical Fathers) are almost entirely spurious." Hist. of early Opinions, Vol. I. p. 93. "The evidence of the facts I refer to does not depend upon writings, the

rejects them as being grossly corrupted, or altogether supposititious, why has he attempted to defend his cause by their authority? If he supposes them to be the real productions of the first century, and reasons on that supposition in favour of his own system, why are not others to be allowed the same privilege?

In fact, the writings under the name of Barnabas, Clemens Romanus (I speak only of the first Epistle) and Hermas are allowed, by the almost universal concurrence of the learned, to have been compositions of the first century; whether they were all written by the persons, whose names they bear, or not. It is admitted also, that the Epistle of Polycarp was written at the opening of the second century: and those, which are called the genuine Epistles of Ignatius, are now generally allowed to have been of the same age; though considerable doubts are entertained about their purity.

II. The Epistle under the name of Barnabas was quoted by Clemens Alexandrinus, and before his time an allusion seems to have been made to it by Celsus³, who lived in the middle of the second cen-

the authenticity and purity of which are so questionable as those of the Apostolic Fathers; but, on the uniform concurrent testimony of all the Christian writers from the age of the Apostles till long after the Council of Nice." Letter to Parkhurst.

Yet Dr Priestley has appealed to Polycarp to *prove* the truth of one of his opinions. "*As a proof* has been required that the phrase *coming in the flesh* is descriptive of the Gnostic heresy only, and not of the Unitarian doctrine also, I would observe, that it is so used in the Epistle of Polycarp, the disciple of John."

³ Origen cont. Cels. p. 49.

tury. In this Epistle the Divinity of Christ is clearly taught; and that in the old Latin version, where no marks of interpolation have been discovered¹.

Mr Wakefield, after having raised some imaginary difficulties about the meaning of two of the passages on this subject, has the candour, however, to acknowledge: "If I may be allowed to draw any conclusion from such questionable premises, I shall not hesitate to declare, that this Barnabas, or rather, perhaps, this Pseudo-Barnabas, in my opinion, believed in the pre-existence of Jesus Christ²."

III. The pre-existence of Christ is also taught in the Shepherd of Hermas. "We have competent external evidence," in the testimonies of Irenæus, Clemens Alexandrinus and Tertullian, "that Hermas, spoken of by St Paul, was the author of the Shepherd." And the genuineness of the passages on the nature of Christ is unquestionable. The style of this book, which no translation can disguise, and which hardly admits of imitation, prevents all suspicion of interpolation.

In the third book, Simil. 5³, Hermas calls the Holy Ghost the Son of God, and Jesus Christ the servant of God, probably in allusion to the words of St Paul: "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him

¹ See pp. 108, 109 of this Volume.

² Inquiry into the Opinions of Christian writers of the three first centuries, p. 309.

³ Page 427. Wake's Trans.

the form of a servant⁴." He answers the objections likely to arise from considering Christ as a servant⁵; and afterwards expresses himself in these remarkable terms: "First of all, Sir, shew me this. This Rock and Gate, what do they mean? Attend, he says; this Rock and Gate is the Son of God. Why, Sir, I replied, is the Rock old, but the Gate new? Hear, says he, simpleton, and understand. The Son of God is *indeed more ancient than every creature, so that he was present to his Father in his plan for making the creature*. But, the Gate is new for this reason; because in the consummation *in these last days he hath appeared*, that they, who shall attain salvation, may enter through it into the kingdom of God⁶."

"The name of the Son of God is great and immense, and the whole world is sustained by him⁷." These passages require no comment: and Mr Wakefield has hardly acted with his usual frankness, in not openly allowing, that they contain the doctrines of the Divinity and pre-existence of Christ.

IV. It is unnecessary to repeat the ancient testimonies, by which the first Epistle of Clemens Romanus is proved to be genuine⁸. Photius has observed, that the author of this Epistle has only used terms expressive of the humanity of Christ: but, he acknowledges, at the same time, that nothing is contained in it against the doctrine of his Divinity.

⁴ Philip. ii. 6, 7.

⁵ Page 435.

⁶ Wakefield's Trans. 3. 9. 12.

⁷ Ibid. 3. 9. 14.

⁸ See Cave, Du Pin and Lardner.

And “even in this Epistle mention is made of *the sufferings of God*¹, which was probably not observed by Photius².” The pre-existence, and perhaps the omnipotence, of Christ seem also to be expressed in another passage of this Epistle.

“The Sceptre of the Majesty of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, came not in the pomp of pride and arrogance, although he had it in his power.”

It has been observed, that the copy used by Jerom had probably *καίπερ πάντα δυνάμενος* instead of *καίπερ δυνάμενος*: since his translation runs thus: “Sceptrum Dei Dominus Jesus Christus non venit in jactantiâ superbîæ *cum possit omnia*³:”—“Though he had all things in his power.”

It seems to be admitted even by Unitarians, that the expression *Sufferings of God*, implies the Divinity of Christ: this, I think, appears from the spirit of their remarks upon it:—“This is language so exceedingly shocking, and unscriptural, that it is hardly possible to think, that it could be used by any writer so near the time of the Apostles⁴.” Mr Parkhurst’s reply to this observation will be found in the subjoined note⁵.

¹ Τοῖς ἐφοδίοις τοῦ θεοῦ ἀρκούμενοι καὶ τὰ παθήματα αὐτοῦ ἦν πρὸ ὀφθαλμῶν ὑμῶν. § 2.

² Tillemont, Mem. Eccles. under Clement I.

³ Hieron. in Esaiam. c. lli.

⁴ History of early Opinions, Vol. i. p. 97.

⁵ And yet the Apostle Paul had directed the elders of Ephesus *to feed the Church of God, which he had purchased with HIS OWN blood*, διὰ τοῦ ἸΔΙΟΥ αἵματος, Acts xx. 28. And the expression, *sufferings of God*, meaning of that *man* who was also *God*, is surely not more improper than that of *God’s own blood*, meaning *the blood of him* who was *God* as well as *man*. I am well aware that some copies, in this text of the Acts, have Κυρίου instead of Θεοῦ; but it should be observed, that the *Church of the*

When we recollect the universal applause, with which the name of Clemens was mentioned by *Trinitarians*⁶, in the second, third and following centuries, and attend, at the same time, to this internal evidence in his Epistle; it will not be doubted but that he was a believer in the Divinity of Christ.

the Lord is a phrase that occurs no where else in the New Testament; whereas the *Church of God* is according to St Paul's usual style. See 1 Cor. i. 2. x. 32. xi. 22. xv. 9. 2 Cor. i. 1. Gal. i. 13. 1 Tim. iii. 5. 15. and Dr Mill on Acts xx. 28. And we have already seen *Ignatius*, Ephes. § 1, using the phrase, *blood of God*, which is a confirmation of the true reading in Acts xx. 28.; and this reading, and the expressions of *Ignatius* and *Clement*, mutually support each other. But there is nothing wonderful in Dr P's catching at *Junius's* opinion concerning the passage in *Clement*; because he certainly wished to get rid of the obnoxious words παθήματα αὐτοῦ, which contain a clear and positive proof of this apostolical writer's faith in the *Divinity of Christ*; and that too in an epistle, the genuineness of which he himself admits. But although *Junius*, not understanding the text in *Clement*, attempted to amend it by a conjectural substitution of μαθήματα, precepts, for παθήματα, sufferings, yet the sense of the true reading is cleared in *Cotelierius's* note on the place, and the reading itself satisfactorily defended against the conjecture of *Junius*, by the learned Dr Grabe, in his Annotation on Bishop Bull's Latin Works, folio, p. 57, 58. And as I have been led to take notice of *Clement's* Epistle, I shall here cite the beginning of his 32d Section: "If any one shall consider them singly and distinctly, he will acknowledge the magnificence of the gifts given through him (i. e. Jacob). For from him are the priests and the Levites, all who minister at the altar of God; from him the Lord Jesus according to the flesh." (*—'Εξ αὐτοῦ γὰρ ἱερεῖς καὶ λευῖται, πάντες οἱ λειτουργοῦντες τῷ θυσιαστηρίῳ τοῦ Θεοῦ. ἔξ αὐτοῦ Κύριος Ἰησοῦς ΤΟ ΚΑΤΑ ΣΑΡΚΑ. See Dr Lardner's Credibility, Part II. Vol. I. pp. 77, 78.) Now let the reader attentively compare this quotation with Rom. ix. 4, 5, and then determine for himself, whether, in the words, "from him the Lord Jesus according to the flesh," *Clement* did not refer to Rom. ix. 5; and consequently, whether, in using them, he had not respect to that *Divine Nature* in Christ, which was not from Jacob. It is however, I hope, on the whole, evident, how well *Clement* agreed, as to the doctrine of Christ's *Divinity*, not only with *Ignatius*, but likewise with his friend and fellow-labourer St Paul. (See Phil. iv. 3.) Parkhurst on the Divinity of Christ, p. 140, &c.

⁶ To mention only one instance of the approbation of the religious tenets of Clemens, by a believer in the Divinity of Christ. Eusebius styles

V. In those, which are called the genuine Epistles of Ignatius, the Divinity of Christ is frequently and strongly inculcated: this is universally allowed: but it is at the same time, urged, and with reason, that even these Epistles are not entirely without the appearance of interpolation. They are, however, so generally allowed to be genuine in the main, and their interpolations are commonly thought to be so inconsiderable, that, in an inquiry into the state of opinion in the two first centuries, they may be referred to, though not with perfect confidence, as authentic documents of those times¹.

Since the controversy on this subject, in the last century², the question relating to the genuineness of

styles Quadratus, Clemens, Ignatius, Polycarp, and Papias, θεοπρεπεῖς μαθηταὶ of the Apostles, “by whose writings,” he says, “the tradition of the Apostolical doctrine is still conveyed down to us.” Ὡς ἔτι καὶ νῦν εἰς ἡμᾶς δι’ ὑπομνημάτων τῆς ἀποστολικῆς διδασκαλίας ἡ παράδοσις φέρεται. Hist. L. III. c. 37. comp. cc. 36, 38, 39. This tradition, which Eusebius asserted was preserved in the Church, is particularly opposed against Unitarianism by himself, L. III. cont. Marcellum, c. 6.

¹ See the Testimonies to Ignatius, in Lardner and Du Pin.

² “That *Ignatius* was bishop of *Antioch* in *Syria*, in the latter part of the first, and the beginning of the second century after Christ, is indisputable, and admitted on all hands. And *Chrysostom* tells us, that ‘he was intimately acquainted with the Apostles; enjoyed their spiritual instruction, even in the most sublime mysteries of Christianity; and was by them thought worthy of the bishopric to which he was advanced.’ There are a number of epistles extant under his name. Several of these are, by all learned men, rejected as *spurious*: and of the *seven* remaining ones there are two editions, the one *larger*, the other *shorter*. The larger is so evidently *corrupted* and *interpolated*, that perhaps there is, at this day, scarcely a man of learning in the world, who does not prefer the other: and as to the *shorter* epistles themselves, there were, in the last century, different opinions concerning them; till at length a warm and close controversy arose between Mons. *Daille*, a celebrated French divine, and our eminent Bishop *Pearson*;

the Epistles seems to have been at an end: no argument having been brought forward since that time,

Pearson; the former having attacked, and the latter defending, the genuineness of the seven shorter Epistles of *Ignatius*. Bishop *Pearson's* work, intituled *Vindiciæ Epistolarum Sancti Ignatii*, was first published in 1672; and gave such general satisfaction, that since that time there have been few men of any note, who have maintained that these Epistles were not, at least in the main, genuine. As for what Dr *Priestley* asserts, Vol. i. p. 107, that '*Le Sueur*, after having given an account of the whole matter, says that Mr *Daille* has clearly proved that the first, or small collection of *Ignatius's* Epistles was forged about the beginning of the fourth century, or two hundred years after the death of *Ignatus*'—I answer, that both Bishop *Pearson* and Archbishop *Wake* have entirely demolished this weak pretence of *Daille's*. 'In the Epistles of *Ignatius* (meaning his shorter epistles) there is,' says Dr *Jortin*, 'a harshness of style, but a lively spirit, and a noble enthusiasm, especially in that to the Romans.—But though the shorter epistles are, on many accounts, preferable to the larger, I will not affirm that they have undergone *no alteration at all*.' (Remarks on Eccles. Hist. Vol. i. pp. 234. 239, 2d. Ed.) 'Considering then, says Dr *Lardner*, these testimonies I have alleged from *Irenæus*, *Origen*, and *Eusebius*, and also the internal characters of great simplicity and piety which are in these epistles (I mean the smaller), it appears to me probable that they are, for the main, the genuine epistles of *Ignatius*. If there be only some few sentiments and expressions which seem inconsistent with the true age of *Ignatius*, 'tis more reasonable to suppose them to be additions, than to reject the epistles themselves entirely; especially in this scarcity of copies which we now labour under. As the interpolations of the larger epistles are plainly the work of some *Arian*, so even the smaller epistles may have been tampered with by the *Arians*, or the orthodox, or both; though I don't affirm that there are in them any considerable corruptions or alterations.'

"Thus these two learned and able critics, Dr *Jortin* and Dr *Lardner*. But not so Dr *Priestley*."

'For my own part,' says he, p. 108, 'I scruple not to say that there never were more evident marks of interpolation in any writing, than are to be found in these genuine epistles, as they are called, of *Ignatius*: though I am willing to allow, on reconsidering them, that, exclusive of manifest interpolation, there may be a groundwork of antiquity in them. The famous passage in *Josephus*, concerning Christ, is not a more evident interpolation than many in these Epistles of *Ignatius*.'

to prove them spurious or grossly corrupted, which critics have thought worthy of attention, and which had not been either satisfactorily answered, or obviated, in Bp Pearson's *Vindiciæ Ignatianæ*. Lately, indeed, Mr Wakefield has endeavoured to prove them interpolated on the subject of the Divinity of Christ by an argument, which has, at least, the merit of originality. He produces passages from those, which are called the genuine Epistles; and comparing them with the corresponding parts in the set of Epistles, which are allowed to be interpolated, he sometimes finds, that Jesus Christ is more exalted in the former than in the latter¹: he then proceeds to reason thus:

"And this last proposition I directly and positively deny; and though such *vapouring* may impose upon the ignorant and illiterate, whether male or female, yet I believe Dr Priestley will hardly find one *man of learning* (Mr Gilbert Wakefield excepted) to join with him in so extravagant an assertion. And notwithstanding he talks thus confidently of the *many* evident interpolations in the genuine epistles of *Ignatius*, he does not produce *one*. For the Doctor on this, as on other occasions, finds it much easier to *assert* than to *prove*.

"Guided therefore by my own deliberate judgement concerning the genuineness of *the seven shorter Epistles of Ignatius*, and supported by the authority of such critical scholars as Archbishop Usher, Grotius, Hammond, Pearson, Bull, Grabe, Jo. Albert. Fabricius, Wake, and Cave, I shall now produce what that blessed martyr, the disciple and intimate companion of the Apostles, hath said, not only concerning the *Divinity* and *Pre-existence* of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, but also concerning his *miraculous Conception*, and *the Doctrine of the Trinity*." Parkhurst, p. 130.

The genuine.

¹ Endeavour, therefore, to be confirmed in the Doctrines of the Lord and the Apostles; that ye may prosper in all that ye do, in Flesh and Spirit, in Faith and Love, IN THE SON AND THE FATHER AND THE SPIRIT, in the Beginning and in the End, with your most worthy

“ When the notorious purpose of the interpolator of these Epistles was the aggrandisement of the person of Jesus Christ—the establishment of his pre-existence and Godhead, as the paragraphs allowed to be spurious demonstrably evince, is it possible, that he should pass over in the genuine Epistles, upon which the other are formed, such expressions as we find to be omitted in the last quotation of the corrupted set? Until this objection be refuted, I will maintain that these *genuine* productions of Ignatius have been notoriously adulterated, *since the days of the earliest interpolator*².”

1. This objection appears to have arisen from a want of sufficient attention to the design of the interpolator. It is clearly proved by Grabe³, that

worthy Bishop, and that well-woven spiritual Crown your Presbytery, and the Deacons according to God. Submit to the Bishop and to each other, as Jesus Christ to the Father ACCORDING TO THE FLESH, *and the Apostles* TO CHRIST AND THE FATHER AND THE SPIRIT: *that there may be* BOTH A CARNAL AND SPIRITUAL Union. Sect. 13.

The interpolated.

Endeavour, therefore, to be confirmed in the Doctrines of the Lord and the Apostles; that all Things, which ye do, may prosper, in Flesh and Spirit, in Faith and Love with your most worthy Bishop, and the well-woven and spiritual Crown your Presbytery, and the Deacons according to God. Submit to the Bishop and to each other, as Christ to the Father; that there may be in you an Union according to God.

“ Is it not most evident from a Comparison of the *two* Passages, that the *genuine Epistles*, as they are called, have been corrupted, as well as the interpolated; and often to a much greater Degree? If any Man will be contumacious enough to dispute what appears so extremely manifest and undeniable, I must insist upon a satisfactory Answer to the following Question.” Wakefield.

² Enquiry into the Opinions of the Christian Writers of the three first Centuries, p. 337.

³ Grabe, Spicilegium, Not. p. 225. Tom. II. Ed. Oxon. 1714.

his purpose was to favour the *Arian* scheme; and therefore the mutilation of those passages, which came up to the orthodoxy of the age, would be perfectly consistent with his design. Mr Wakefield would have suppressed his objection, if he had attended to this circumstance.

2. Were his hypothesis respecting the *time* of the supposed adulteration of the genuine Epistles admitted, it would, without any other consideration, go very near to prove, that the Divinity of Christ was originally taught in them, as they came from the hands of Ignatius. As most impartial critics will be disposed to say, with Lardner, "I do not affirm that there are in them any considerable alterations or corruptions"—if it could be determined that alterations or corruptions were made in the genuine Epistles, since the interpolated Epistles were formed, as Mr Wakefield endeavours to demonstrate, their purity *before* that time would be proved to a considerable degree of probability; and we might quote with increased, and almost perfect confidence of their genuineness, any passages which can be shown to have been in them, before the beginning of the sixth century, when the interpolated Epistles were composed¹. Now, about the year 449, Theodoret cited passages from the Epistles of Ignatius, in which the Divinity of Christ is acknowledged in plain terms; in which he is called "the Son of David according to the flesh," "the Son of God in Divinity and power, truly born of a virgin;" and

¹ Cave, *Hist. Literaria*, p. 27, and Du Pin, under *Ignatius*.

“Our God Jesus Christ;” and “The Son of Man and the Son of God².”

The same doctrines and the same peculiarity of language, which we at present observe in these Epistles, were found in them by Theodoret, nearly a century before “the time of the earliest interpolator.” We might therefore, after bowing to Mr Wakefield for his defence of Ignatius, retire, and leave him in the full possession of his own argument.

VI. Dr Priestley has strongly contended for the spuriousness or gross corruption of the genuine Epistles of Ignatius³: but, on looking through his writings, no critical argument is found in support of his opinion; except an assertion, that the expressions, “Christ a God” and “Christ our God” are not the language of any age of Christianity.—“This, Sir, is neither apostolical language, nor, indeed, that of any writer whatever, in *any* age of the Church⁴.”

To an old objection we may repeat an old answer. “The objections taken from the style,” says Du Pin,

² Ὅντα ἐκ γένους Δαβὶδ κατὰ σάρκα, υἷον Θεοῦ κατὰ θεότητα καὶ δύναμιν, γεγεννημένον ἀληθῶς ἐκ παρθένου.

Ὁ γὰρ θεὸς ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς Χριστός.

Τῷ υἱῷ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, καὶ υἱῷ τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ignat. in Theodoret. Dial. Immutab. V. Pearson. Vindic. Part. 1. c. i. p. 10.

³ “You must know that the genuineness of them is not only very much doubted, but generally given up by the learned.” Letter to Dr Horsley, Part 1. p. 13.

⁴ Letter to Parkhurst. “This perpetual addition of the term *God* to the word *Christ* is generally considered as an interpolation. It is, indeed, a manifest and absurd one, such a phraseology not resembling any thing in that age, or indeed in *any subsequent one*.” Letter to Dr Knowles.

“are of little moment: for, who has informed these modern critics what *was* the style of Ignatius’s age.” Is it from Pliny that Dr Priestley has learnt that the term “*God*” was not applied to Christ by Christians in the first Century¹; Or, has he collected this information from Clemens Romanus², or Celsus³, or Sulpicius Severus⁴? Or, is it a mere conjecture of his own?

The application of this term to Christ, in the Epistles of Ignatius, has sometimes, though not always, a suspicious appearance: but, it is not to be expunged with so little ceremony as that of a random dash from the hasty pen of Dr Priestley.

VII. It has lately been intimated, that the arguments of Pearson, by which the genuineness of the Epistles of Ignatius was established, were invalidated by the answer of Larroque⁵. This notion, however, has only been just taken up. It was fully admitted, soon after the controversy was over, that the reasoning of the latter author had not at all affected the work of the learned Prelate, against which he wrote; and his objections were instantly refuted by Bull⁶,

¹ Carmenque Christo quasi Deo dicere secum invicem.

² Παθήματα αὐτοῦ. i. e. Θεοῦ.

³ Ὡς φατέ, Θεὸς ᾧν. “Being, *as you say*, a God.”

⁴ “Pene omnes Christum Deum sub legis observatione credebant.”

⁵ “I, Sir, shall save myself that trouble, till you shall have replied to every part of Larroque’s answer to this work of Pearson; a work, which I suspect you have not *looked into*.” Letter 2d. to the Arch-deacon of St. Albans, Part II.

⁶ Defens. Fid. Nic. Sect. III. c. i. § 10. et seq.

Nicolaus le Nourry⁷, Du Pin⁸ and others. The opinion of the critics on this subject is very fairly and accurately stated by a learned Unitarian at the end of the last century.—“*Illarum rerum periti, utroque opere diligenter perlecto, negarunt eruditum illum virum ullâ ratione Pearsoni argumenta labefactasse*.”

VIII. 1. After all due abatements for a want of perfect assurance of the purity of the genuine Epistles—or rather, after admitting, that some parts of them bear evident marks of interpolation—it must be allowed to be, at least, highly probable from the internal evidence contained in them, that their author was a believer in the Divinity of Christ. When to this the external evidence is joined, all doubt is at an end.

2. Origen, little more than a century after Ignatius, cited a passage from an Epistle containing an allusion to the miraculous conception of Christ: and this passage is now found in the genuine Epistles.

“*Eleganter in cujusdam Martyris Epistolâ scriptum reperi; Ignatium dico, Episcopum Antiochiæ post Petrum secundum; qui in persecutione Romæ pugnavit ad bestias, Principem sæculi hujus latuit*

⁷ Tom. i. Apparatus ad Bibliothecam max. Patrum.

⁸ History of Eccles. Writers—Ignatius.

⁹ Clericus in Præfat. Epist. Ignat. præmissâ. [In a list of additions and corrections subjoined to the first edition, the Author observes:—“I believe I have committed an error in representing Le Clerc as an Unitarian. See his Life in the Additions to the English edition of Bayle.”]

virginitas Mariæ¹. The citation is from the Epistle to the Ephesians, ἔλαθεν τὸν ἄρχοντα τοῦ αἰῶνος τοῦ-
του ἡ παρθενία Μαρίας.

3. Ignatius suffered martyrdom about A. D. 107. A circumstantial relation of that tragical event has been preserved to our times; and, *on its authority*, Dr Priestley has concluded, that he spoke the language of an Unitarian. In this relation, a passage, which shows his belief in the Divinity of Christ, has been overlooked; while another, which only shows, that he was not a polytheist², has been preposterously brought forward to prove him an Unitarian.

“All the brethren kneeling down, *he prayed to the Son of God* in behalf of the churches³.”

4. Without insisting on the genuineness of any passage in the Epistles of Ignatius, in which the Divinity of Christ is taught; assuming no more than that the parts of them relating to indifferent matters have not been materially altered by corruption; the religious opinions of Ignatius may be identified with those of the church of Smyrna: and it appears by

¹ Hom. 6. Hieronymo Interprete. Pearson, Vindiciæ Ignatianæ, p. 7. Part 1.

² “What this excellent man said, when he appeared before the emperor Trajan, was the language of an Unitarian: ‘You err,’ he said, ‘in that you call the evil spirits of the heathens, Gods.’ For there is but one God, who made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all that are in them; and one Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, whose friendship may I enjoy.” Hist. of early Opinions, Vol. 1. p. 262.

³ Relation of the Martyrdom of Ignatius, Wake’s Translation, § 12. It must, however, be allowed, as Mr Gibbon has somewhere observed, that “neither the Epistles nor the *Acts* of Ignatius can be used with perfect confidence.”

other evidence⁴ that they were believers in the Divinity of Christ.

The general design of his Epistle to the Smyrnæans is not to convert them from any established error, but *to confirm* them in their faith, to guard them against the new heresy of the Gnostics, and to persuade them to follow their Bishop and Pastors, but especially their Bishop Polycarp, a believer in the Divinity of Christ.

“I glorify God, even Jesus Christ, who has thus filled you with all wisdom: for, I have understood how that you are settled in an *immoveable* faith⁵.”

This language could not have proceeded from an Unitarian to a body of people, who believed in the Divinity of Christ. The faith of the church of Smyrna, and of Polycarp their Bishop, must have been that of Ignatius.

After this, it would be superfluous to state the testimonies of Theophilus, Eusebius, Athanasius, Jerom and Theodoret: one of whom mentions that Ignatius confirmed the churches of the several cities, through which he passed, in the true faith; and

⁴ Ἀγνοοῦντες ὅτι οὔτε τὸν Χριστὸν ποτε καταλιπεῖν δυνησόμεθα—οὔτε ἕτερόν τινα σέβειν. τοῦτον μὲν γὰρ, υἱὸν ὄντα τοῦ θεοῦ, προσκυνούμεν· τοὺς δὲ μάρτυρας, ὡς μαθητὰς τοῦ Κυρίου καὶ μιμητὰς, ἀγαπῶμεν ἀξίως. § 17.

“Not knowing, that neither is it possible for us ever to forsake Christ—nor worship any other besides him. For him, indeed, as being the Son of God *we adore*: but for the Martyrs we worthily love them, as the disciples and followers of our Lord.” Circ. Epistle of the Church of Smyrna. Wake’s Trans.

This passage, together with most of the Epistle, was quoted by Eusebius.

⁵ Ign. Ep. to Smyrnæans, § 1.

admonished them to avoid heresies, by constantly adhering to the Apostolical tradition¹: which faith of the Christian church and which Apostolical tradition are in other parts of his works directly opposed to Unitarianism. Three others of these writers have cited passages from his works in which the miraculous conception and Divinity of Christ are taught²: and the fourth has ranked him with the members of the church, who were most distinguished for their orthodoxy; Polycarp, Justin Martyr and Irenæus³.

IX. It would be unreasonable to expect an exposition of the religious opinions of Polycarp in a single Letter, the only work of his of which we are in possession, and which consists of only a few pages⁴. In it, indeed, he calls God the Father of our Jesus Christ; and Jesus the Son of God (§ 12.); but from his Epistle alone it cannot be collected in what sense he understood these terms. By the same sort of external evidence, however, (though much stronger in degree) as that by which we determine the opinions

¹ Eusebius, L. III. c. 36, 37, 38, 39.

² V. Pearson, Vind. Ignat. Part. I. c. II.

³ Nunquid non possum tibi totam veterum scriptorum seriem commovere, Ignatium, Polycarpum, Irenæum, Justinum Martyrem, multosque alios Apostolicos et eloquentes viros, qui adversus Hebionem et Theodotum Byzantinum et Valentinum hæc eadem sentientes plena sapientiæ volumina conscripserunt." Hieronymus adv. Helvidium.

⁴ Spanheim, speaking of a writer, who had appealed to Clemens Romanus and Polycarp against the doctrine of the Trinity, observes, "Tuetur se *silentio* Clementis Rom. et Polycarpi in epistolis quæ eorum nomen præferunt: in quibus tamen nihil reperit, quod vel in speciem sacrosanctis de Trinitate, aut divinitate Filii dogmatibus adversetur." Introd. in Chronolog. p. 198.

of Cerinthus, Carpocrates, Valentinus, Melito and others, who either never wrote, or whose writings are lost, we know, that Polycarp was a believer in the Divinity of Christ.

1. The words of his last doxology are preserved in the circular Epistle of the church of Smyrna, which was written on the subject of his martyrdom. "I praise thee, I bless thee, I glorify thee with the eternal and heavenly Jesus Christ thy beloved Son, with whom to thee and the Holy Ghost, be glory both now and to all succeeding ages^b." This is not the language of an Unitarian^c.

2. Irenæus, the disciple of Polycarp, has borne the most ample testimony to the coincidence of their religious opinions. "When I was yet a child I saw you in splendour in lower Asia, in the royal palace with Polycarp, and endeavouring to gain his favour: for I more thoroughly remember events of that time than those of later date; (for things learnt in childhood growing with the mind unite with it); so that I can tell both the place where the blessed Polycarp sat and taught, and his going out and in, and his manner of life and the form of his person, and the

^b These words, together with nearly the whole Epistle, are cited by Eusebius, Hist. L. iv. c. xv.

^c Dr Priestley asserts that the doxology of which these words are a part, is addressed to God the Father and not to Christ. "This prayer is addressed to God the Father and not to Christ; so that this disciple of the Apostle John did not think the example of Stephen any precedent for him." Letters to the Archdeacon of St Alban's, Part II. p. 158. He will have some difficulty in shewing the necessity of this inference, and in reconciling the passage above cited with the doctrine of Socinus.

discourses which he held to the people, and that he used to speak of his conversation with John and with the rest, who had seen the Lord, and to relate their sayings, and what he had heard from them concerning the Lord; and that Polycarp, having received his information from eye-witnesses of the word of life, reported all things relating to his miracles *and doctrine agreeable to the Scriptures*¹.”

According to this testimony, the doctrines, which Irenæus thought scriptural, were the doctrines of Polycarp.

“Polycarp, who had not only been instructed by the Apostles, and conversed with many, who had seen Christ, but, had been also appointed by the Apostles bishop in Asia, in the church of Smyrna; whom we have seen in the early part of our life (for he lived very long, and quitted life in a very old age, having suffered martyrdom with glory and very high renown) having always taught the doctrines which he had

¹ Εἶδον γάρ σε παῖς ὧν ἔτι, ἐν τῇ κάτω Ἀσίᾳ παρὰ τῷ Πολυκάρπῳ, λαμπρῶς πράττοντα ἐν τῇ βασιλικῇ αὐλῇ, καὶ πειρώμενον εὐδοκίμεῖν παρ’ αὐτῷ. μᾶλλον γὰρ τὰ τότε διαμνημονεύω τῶν ἑναγχοῦς γινομένων. αἱ γὰρ ἐκ παίδων μαθήσεις συναύξουσαι τῇ ψυχῇ ἐνοῦνται αὐτῇ· ὥστέ με δύνασθαι εἰπεῖν καὶ τὸν τόπον, ἐν ᾧ καθιζόμενος διελέγετο ὁ μακάριος Πολύκαρπος· καὶ τὰς προόδους αὐτοῦ καὶ τὰς εἰσόδους· καὶ τὸν χαρακτῆρα τοῦ βίου, καὶ τὴν τοῦ σώματος ἰδέαν· καὶ τὰς διαλέξεις αἷς ἐποίειτο πρὸς τὸ πλῆθος· καὶ τὴν μετὰ Ἰωάννου συναναστροφὴν ὡς ἀπήγγελλε, καὶ τὴν μετὰ τῶν λοιπῶν τῶν εὐρακότων τὸν Κύριον. καὶ ὡς ἀπεμνημόνευε τοὺς λόγους αὐτῶν, καὶ περὶ τοῦ Κυρίου τίνα ἦν ἂ παρ’ ἐκείνων ἀκηκόει. καὶ περὶ τῶν δυνάμεων αὐτοῦ, καὶ περὶ τῆς διδασκαλίας, ὡς παρ’ αὐτοπτῶν τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ λόγου παρειληφώς ὁ Πολύκαρπος, ἀπήγγελλε πάντα σύμφωνα ταῖς γραφαῖς. Iren. Epist. ad Florinum ap. Eusebium. L. v. c. xx.

learnt from the Apostles, and which the Church hands down, and which alone are true, &c.”

“The Church, though disseminated through the whole world to the very bounds of the earth, having received from the Apostles and their disciples the faith in one God the Father Almighty, and in one Jesus Christ the Son of God invested with flesh for our salvation, and in the Holy Ghost³.” &c.

“The Church throughout the world diligently keeps this faith, and believes these articles, as if it had the same soul and the same heart⁴.”

Irenæus “in many places of his works, and almost as often as he speaks of the *Word*⁵, insists on his Divinity and eternity.” The testimony of such a writer, with such means of information on the subject on which he wrote, completely removes all doubt about the religious opinions of Polycarp.

² Καὶ Πολύκαρπος δὲ οὐ μόνον ὑπὸ ἀποστόλων μαθητευθείς, καὶ συναναστραφεὶς πολλοῖς τοῖς τὸν Χριστὸν ἐωρακόσιν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὑπὸ ἀποστόλων κατασταθεὶς εἰς τὴν Ἀσίαν ἐν τῇ ἐν Σμύρνῃ ἐκκλησίᾳ ἐπίσκοπος, ὃν καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐωράκαμεν ἐν τῇ πρώτῃ ἡμῶν ἡλικίᾳ (ἐπιπολὺ γὰρ παρέμεινε, καὶ πᾶν γηραλέος, ἐνδόξως καὶ ἐπιφανέστατα μαρτυρήσας, ἐξῆλθε τοῦ βίου) ταῦτα διδάξας ἀεὶ, ἃ καὶ παρὰ τῶν ἀποστόλων ἔμαθεν, ἃ καὶ ἡ ἐκκλησία παραδίδωσιν, ἃ καὶ μόνα ἐστὶν ἀληθῆ. Irenæus, L. III. c. iii.

³ Ἡ μὲν γὰρ Ἐκκλησία, καίπερ καθ' ὅλης τῆς οἰκουμένης ἕως περάτων τῆς γῆς διεσπαρμένη, παρὰ δὲ τῶν Ἀποστόλων καὶ τῶν ἐκείνων μαθητῶν παραλαβοῦσα τὴν εἰς ἓνα θεὸν πατέρα παντοκράτορα—πίστιν· καὶ εἰς ἓνα Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ τὸν σαρκωθέντα ὑπὲρ τῆς ἡμετέρας σωτηρίας· καὶ εἰς πνεῦμα ἅγιον. Iren. L. I. c. ii.

⁴ Ταύτην τὴν πίστιν—ἡ Ἐκκλησία—ἐπιμελῶς φυλάσσει—καὶ ὁμοίως πιστεύει τούτοις, ὡς μίαν ψυχὴν καὶ τὴν αὐτὴν ἔχουσα καρδίαν. c. iii.

⁵ Du Pin, under *Irenæus*.

⁶ Iren. L. I. c. xix. L. II. c. xviii. xliiii. xlviii. and lvi. L. III. c. vi. 20.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE INTERPRETATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT, BY THE FIRST
GENTILE CHRISTIANS, COLLECTED FROM THEIR RELIGIOUS OPINIONS.

1. Opinions openly professed and continually taught by the learned will be received by the great body of the people.
2. Popular opinions in any age how collected from contemporary writings.
3. The opinions of the Christians of Philippi collected from the epistle of Polycarp.
- 4, 5, 6, 7. The religious opinions of the Ephesian, Magnesian, Trallian and Roman Christians identified with those of Ignatius.
8. The religious opinions of part of the Christians of Philadelphia the same with those of Ignatius. No evidence that the others believed in the simple humanity of Christ.
9. Statement of Dr Priestley's negative evidence to prove Unitarianism the faith of Polycarp and Ignatius, and of Christians in general of their age. Examination of this evidence. View of the ancient testimonies on the subject of the different Unitarian sects.

1. IT is a maxim, which no modern discovery in ancient history can controvert, that the speculative opinions, which are openly professed, and continually taught by the great body of the learned at any period, are received by the bulk of the people to whom the instruction is given. The Theology of Hesiod, we may safely take for granted, represents the popular religion of the Greeks of his age. In Homer we seldom hear of the actions or the opinions of the common people of the Grecian and Trojan armies; but, as soon as we discover the Theological opinions of their chieftains, when we know, that they addressed their prayers to Jupiter, or Mars, or Minerva, we immediately conclude, that such were the opinions and practices of their followers. If we observe Xenophon consulting the oracle at Delphi, whether he

shall engage in the expedition with Cyrus; if we find him offering sacrifices and addressing his prayers to the gods; we set down these at once as the common customs among the Athenian *people* of his time¹.

If we wish to trace out the opinions of any people of antiquity—on discovering the general spirit of the writings of their men of learning, we immediately consider our purpose accomplished, without imposing on ourselves the additional labour of identifying, by a regular demonstration, the opinions of the people taught with those of their teachers. As soon as external evidence informs us of the sentiments of Cerinthus and Carpocrates, we suppose, even without a momentary hesitation, that we have determined those of the first Cerinthians and Carpocratians.

We ascertain the opinions of the first Socinians by those of Socinus: and when we know, that Dr Price was “inclined to wonder,” at good men satisfying themselves with Socinian interpretations of Scripture², we instantly suppose, that the body of Christians, to whom *his* discourses were usually addressed, felt a difficulty similar to that of their instructor. It is thus, after having discovered the tenets of Polycarp and Ignatius, either by the internal evidence in their writings, or by external testimony,

¹ Anab. L. III.

² “Speaking of the Socinian interpretations of Scripture, you say, p. 135, ‘I must own to you, that I am inclined to wonder, that good men can satisfy themselves with such explanations.’ However you candidly add, ‘But I correct myself. I know that Christians, amidst their differences of opinion, are too apt to wonder at one another, and to forget the allowances that ought to be made for the darkness, in which we are all involved.’” Priestley, *Letters to Dr Price*, p. 165.

that we conclude the members of the Christian Churches in Asia, of which they were the principal teachers, to have been believers in the Divinity of Christ.

A discovery indeed of a very singular nature, it is said, has lately been made in the state of the religious opinions of Christians in the second, third and fourth, nay even in the fifth and sixth centuries. It is maintained, not only with every appearance of seriousness, but with all the ardour of proselyting zeal¹, that the learned and the unlearned in those early ages were of opposite opinions on a leading article of their religion; that the writers and the rulers of the Church believed in the Divinity of Christ, while the common people held him to be no more than man; that the electors and the elected, the teachers and the people taught were uniformly opposed to one another in their sentiments on this subject, from the time of Justin Martyr down to the age of Jerom, at least. This notion has not, however, been extended backward to the first century. No one has yet undertaken to prove an

¹ Mr Lindsey has shewn considerable zeal in spreading Dr Priestley's *Historical and Critical Discoveries*, together with some of his own, among "the Youth of the two Universities."

"HERETOFORE, many Christians, who saw that there was no foundation in the Scriptures for the Divinity of Christ, or for his being any thing more than a man with an extraordinary commission and power from God, *did not know what to make of* some of the earliest Christian writers embracing a contrary opinion."

"Concerning this large *field*, or more justly to speak, this overgrown *wood* of Christian antiquity, which our author *alone* hath cleared up, and in which he hath made such *discoveries*, &c."

"The distinction of the opinion of the early writers from that of the common people was never before observed by any one." Lindsey, *Vindice Priestley*—Postscript.

opposition between the people and those whom they had elected for their instructors, or who had received their appointments from the Apostles, before Justin's age; so that, after determining the religious opinions of the Apostolical Fathers, we may still be allowed to consider them as representing the opinions of the Christian Church in general, in the first century, and the beginning of the second. But it will not be difficult to prove the truth of a proposition, which we might safely have taken for granted.

II. If writers complain of the obstinacy and incredulity of the people of their own age; if they complain of persecution on account of the doctrines which they teach; if they apologize for their own sentiments, and take great pains to remove prejudices against them; if they betray doubts and fears, that their opinions are not suitable to the spirit of the times; if the obvious design of their writings be rather to convert others from their belief, than to confirm them in it; the great mass of the people, with whom they are thus concerned, we may safely affirm, entertain some opinions essentially different from their own. By these rules, we might determine, from the Apologies of the Christians in the second century, without any other evidence, that the great body of the people in the Roman provinces were not converted to Christianity.

On the contrary, when the writers commend the opinions of those, to whom they address themselves: when they appear solicitous to confirm them in their

present persuasions; when they try to guard them against the error of new opinions, instead of attempting to eradicate old and inveterate prejudices; when they show no apprehension, that the doctrines which they teach will be denied or doubted; when the writers, who maintain any system of theological opinions, either commend the faith of the people, and complain only of their want of *knowledge*; or represent them in plain terms as entertaining a common faith with themselves; in any of these cases, we may conclude with certainty, that the writers and the people agree in their sentiments.

By these rules, the religious opinions of Polycarp, Ignatius and Barnabas may be proved to have been the same with those of the people in the churches, to whom they wrote: without taking for granted more than that the general tenour of their Epistles has not been materially altered by interpolation; and without laying any stress whatever on those passages in Ignatius, in which Christ is directly or indirectly called the God of Christians: though some of these are so connected with the substance of the Epistles, that no doubt can be entertained of their genuineness.

III. Let Polycarp speak to the opinions of the Church of Philippi.

“Polycarp and the Presbyters that are with him to the Church of God, which is at Philippi.”.....“I rejoiced greatly—that ye received the images of a true love—as also that the root of faith, which was preached from ancient times, remains firm in you to this day.”

The design of this Epistle, as far as it relates to matters of faith, is to confirm, not to dissuade from, established opinions; and no intimation can be found in it of any individual in the Church of Philippi professing Unitarian opinions. From the opening of the Epistle, which I have cited, and from its general tenour, we may conclude with certainty,

1. That the faith of the great body of the people coincided with his own. 2. That there were, however, among them some individuals, who maintained the doctrines of the Gnostics; who denied the reality of Christ's human body, and consequently his suffering on the cross, and who rejected the notion of a future resurrection and judgement¹.

The first of these conclusions perfectly coincides with the account, derived from another quarter, of Polycarp's influence over the Asiatic Churches. At the time of his martyrdom, "all the multitude of Gentiles and Jews of Smyrna called out — 'This is the teacher of all Asia, the father of the Christians².'"

IV. The religious opinions of the Christians of Ephesus (about A.D. 107.) are easily collected, by attending only to the general design of the Epistle written to them by Ignatius. In it he strongly recommends subjection to their bishop, and warns them against the novel opinions of the Gnostics³, exhorts them to *perseverance* in their present faith, and bears the fullest testimony to its purity⁴, asserting that no

¹ Sect. VI. VII.

² Circular Letter of the Church of Smyrna.

³ Sect. VII. XVI. XVII, &c.

⁴ Sect. I. VIII. X. XI.

heresy dwells among them¹. “Let no man deceive you; as indeed neither are ye deceived, being wholly the servants of God.—Nevertheless, I have heard of some, who have gone to you having perverse doctrine; whom you did not suffer to sow among you, but stopped your ears².—To their blasphemies return your prayers: to their error your firmness of faith³.”

Ignatius, a believer in the Divinity of Christ, would not have written in this general strain to Unitarians. Had his notions been materially different from theirs, he would have exhorted them to turn from their erroneous opinions, or would not, at least, have mentioned them with unqualified approbation.

V. The opinions of the Christians of Magnesia may also be identified with those of Ignatius. When he directed his Epistle to them, the Jewish and Gentile members of their church had not perfectly coalesced: it is very probable, from the nature of his exhortation, that they had very lately assembled to worship God in different places⁴; and the purpose of his Epistle seems to be to exhort them to unity, and to caution them both against Judaism and Gnosticism.

The Jewish Christians are strenuously exhorted against following their *old* customs by a literal observance of their Law: and all are at the same time cautioned against some new and strange doctrines, which had found their way among them. Ignatius, after asserting Christ to be the eternal Word of the

¹ Sect. vi.

² Sect. ix.

³ Sect. x.

⁴ Sect. vii.

Father, and not to have come forth *from silence**, immediately observes, that some deny his death†.

From one of these expressions (*coming forth from silence*) it was inferred by Dallæus and others that an allusion was made to a notion of the Valentinians; and therefore that the Epistle, or, at least, this part of it was written after the age of Ignatius.—In answer to this, Pearson *first* endeavoured to prove, that it was the Ebionæan heresy, which Ignatius had in view; because he warned the Magnesians against Judaism; and the caution would have been inapplicable to the Valentinians.

Though in this opinion he is supported by several other writers, both ancient and modern, it must be allowed to be a matter of great uncertainty, whether the Ebionites are ever censured, or noticed in any way by Ignatius. He condemns Judaism, it is true, in this Epistle; but, unless the Ebionites were the *only* Jewish sects of his age, his censure will not necessarily apply to them. And if this part of Bp Pearson's argument had never appeared, his cause would not have been weakened by its suppression; for in his sixth Chapter he has established the opinion of Usher, Vossius and Hammond, beyond all question: having proved, beyond the possibility of contradiction, that Gnosticism had existed early in the first century; that Valentinus copied the body of his system from Basilides and the other early Gnostics; and consequently, that an

* Sect. viii.

† Sect. ix.

‡ C. v. Vind. Ign. part. poster.

allusion to a tenet of Valentinus is no proof of the spuriousness of the Epistle to the Magnesians.

To this we may perhaps venture to add, that they were some of the Jewish Gnostics¹, and not Ebionites, who are censured in this Epistle. "I am desirous to forewarn you," says Ignatius, "that ye fall not into the snares of vain doctrines²: but that ye be fully instructed in the *birth and sufferings and resurrection* of Jesus Christ, our hope; which was done in the time of the government of Pontius Pilate, and that most truly and certainly; and from which God forbid that any among you should be turned aside." This language is evidently pointed against those, who denied the human nature of Christ and the reality of his suffering and resurrection, and not against Ebionites.

Though Ignatius, in this Epistle, appears not to think highly of the firmness of some of the Magnesians, the religious opinions of the great body of them must have coincided with his own. "These things I write, not that I know of any among you, who lie under this error, but am desirous to forewarn you, that ye fall not, &c."—"Study therefore to be *confirmed* in the doctrine of our Lord and of his Apostles."

¹ Some think this Epistle directed against the Cerinthian heresy: but this is not certain. Cerinthus maintained, that Jesus was the son of Joseph and Mary, and that the Christ, a divine or superangelic being, was united to him at his baptism, and deserted him before his crucifixion; so that it was the man Jesus, and not Christ, who really suffered. He also insisted on the necessity of observing the Mosaic Law. See Cave, Hist. Lit.

² Sect. xi.

VI. The Epistle to the Trallians contains unqualified approbation of their conduct: and the design of it is to guard them against new doctrines, those of the Gnostics, not to dissuade them from perseverance in established opinions and habits. “They that are heretics confound together the doctrine of Jesus Christ with their own poison³.”—“Not that I know there is any thing of this nature among you⁴.”

VII. In the Epistle to the Romans, Ignatius requests them to *pray to Christ* for him⁵; and the concluding sentence perhaps implies an approbation of their faith. “Be strong unto the end in the patience of Jesus Christ.” The Salutation is certainly in the language of strong approbation.—“To the Church—beloved and illuminated—which I salute in the name of Jesus Christ, as being united both in flesh and spirit to all his commands.”

This language would probably not have been employed, by a believer in the Divinity of Christ, in an address to a body of Unitarians.

VIII. In the church of Philadelphia a considerable schism had taken place; and Ignatius, in his letter to them, approves of those who adhered to their Bishop, and finds no division among *them*⁶. The others he exhorts to repent, and to return to the unity of the Church. The faith of those, who followed their Bishop, must have corresponded to the

³ Sect. vi.

⁴ Sect. viii.

⁵ Λιτανεύσατε τὸν Χριστὸν ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ. Sect. iv.

⁶ Sect. iii.

notions of Ignatius; but whether they composed the majority of the Church cannot be collected from this Epistle—nor can it be determined whether any of the seceders, who seem to have been Judaizing Christians, were believers in the simple humanity of Christ.

On a general view of the Epistles of Ignatius, it appears, that the religious opinions of the great body of Christians, with whom he corresponded, coincided with his own: that several Christians of his age denied the reality of Christ's human nature, and consequently refused to acknowledge his suffering on the cross, his resurrection, and the atonement for the sins of the world by his death: but it cannot be said with certainty, that he has any where alluded to the opinions of Unitarians.

IX. In this Analysis of the Epistles of Polycarp and Ignatius, it will be seen, that I have fully admitted one of the premises of an argument, by which it has lately been attempted to prove Unitarianism the religion of Christians in general in the first century, and of these two writers in particular: it will now be necessary to make a very serious pause, before the legitimacy of the conclusion be granted.

The argument may be stated in the words of its author.

“Ignatius frequently mentions heresy and heretics; and, like John, with great indignation; but it is evident to every person, who is at all acquainted with the history, learning and language of those

times, and of the subsequent ones, that he had no persons in his eye, but Gnostics only. Now, how came this writer, like John, never to censure the Unitarians¹, if he had thought them to be heretics? Their conduct can only be accounted for on the supposition, that both himself and the Apostle John were Unitarians; and that they had no idea of any heresies, besides those of the different kinds of Gnostics²."

A slight attention to history and chronology, will enable us to discover a satisfactory reason why St John, Polycarp and Ignatius should write with great severity

¹ When Dr Priestley wishes to prove the antiquity of the Ebionites, he produces passages from ancient authors in which St John is declared to have written directly against this sect and that of the Cerinthians. ("You, Mr Archdeacon, are pleased to deny the existence even of the Ebionites in the time of the Apostles, contrary, I will venture to say, to the unanimous testimony of all antiquity.—Jerom, giving an account of the reasons that moved John to write his Gospel, mentions the Ebionites not only as a sect, but a flourishing sect in the time of the Apostles." Joannes scripsit evangelium, rogatus ab Asiæ episcopis, adversus Cerinthum, aliosque hæreticos, et maxime tunc Ebionitarum dogma consurgens, qui asserunt Christum ante Mariam non fuisse, unde et compulsus est divinam ejus naturam dicere. Op. Vol. i. p. 273. This is only one out of many authorities that I could produce for this purpose, and it is not possible to produce any to the contrary." Letter to the Archdeacon of St Albans, Part II. p. 19.). Having proved their antiquity *by such evidence as this*, he soon after reasons on the supposition, that St John did not write directly or indirectly against Ebionites or any other Unitarians, and thence concludes that the Apostle himself was a believer in the simple humanity of Christ.—"Gnosticism having been certainly condemned by the Apostle, and not the doctrine of the Ebionites, I conclude that in the latter, which is allowed to have existed in his time, he saw nothing worthy of censure; but, that it was the doctrine, which he himself had taught." Hist. of Early Opinions, Vol. i. p. 195.

² History of Early Opinions, Vol. i. pp. 258. 260.

against Gnosticism, without directing their attention to the opinions of Unitarians.

In Irenæus, the early heresies are ranked in this order: Simon, Menander, Saturnilus, Basilides, Carpocrates, Cerinthus, the Ebionites and Nicolaitans. In Epiphanius: Simon, Menander, Saturnilus, Basilides, the Nicolaitans, the Gnostics, the Carpocratians, the Cerinthians, the Nazaræans, the Ebionites; whose origin he has fixed some time after the taking of Jerusalem, without mentioning the year¹. In the Appendix to Tertullian's treatise: Simon, Menander, Saturninus, Basilides, Nicolaus, the Ophitæ, Cainæans, Sethians, Carpocratians, Cerinthus, Ebionites. In Theodoret, Carpocrates is placed under Adrian², after Simon, Menander, Saturnilus and Basilides. And the origin of the Nazaræans, Ebionites and Cerinthians, who are declared to have sprung up at the same time, is fixed as early as the reign of Domitian³; *i. e.* between the years 80 and 97. This writer also says, that Simon, Menander and other disciples of Simon appeared while the Apostles were living; and that even Cerinthus spread his doctrine before the death of the Apostle John⁴. In Eusebius, (whom Theodoret seems to have mistaken) the Ebionites and Cerinthians are first mentioned under Trajan⁵; and are both declared to be of the same antiquity: and the Carpocratians are mentioned after

¹ Γέγονε δὲ ἡ ἀρχὴ τοῦτου μετὰ τὴν τῶν Ἱεροσολύμων ἄλωσιν. Epiph. Hær. xxx. § 2.

² Theodoret. Hær. Fab. L. i. c. 5. p. 197.

³ Hær. Fab. L. ii. c. i. 2, 3.

⁴ Hær. Fab. Præf. in Lib. ii.

⁵ Euseb. Hist. L. iii. cc. 27, 28.

them, under Adrian⁶. In Augustine, the same order is observed as in Epiphanius. In Philaster, Simon, Menander, Saturninus, Basilides, and the Nicolaitans are placed before the Carpocratians and Ebionites. In the Alexandrian Chronicle, the origin of the Ebionites is fixed in the year 105.

Though several ancient writers have asserted that St John wrote against the Cerinthian and Ebionæan heresies—from this view of the testimonies of the ancient *historians* on the antiquity of the different sects, it must be allowed to be in some degree doubtful, whether any Unitarian sects existed in his time, or not. The age of Cerinthus (whose peculiar opinion, respecting the union of the divine and human natures in the person of Jesus Christ, prevents him from being properly classed among Unitarians) is very uncertain. “Le Clerc speaks of him at the year 80; Basnage at the year 101. By some he is esteemed a heretic of the first, by others of the second century⁷.”

“Basnage speaks of the Carpocratians at the year 112; Tillemont thinks they might appear about the year 130.” Le Clerc supposes those Ebionites or Nazaræans, who believed in the miraculous conception of Christ, to have first appeared about A. D. 72: those, who believed Christ to be a mere man born of human parents, he fixes in the year 103. Mosheim places the Cerinthians in the first century; but refers the Nazaræans, Ebionites and Carpocratians to the second.

⁶ L. IV. c. 7.

⁷ Lardner, Hist. of Her. c. iv. § 2.

According to the unanimous testimony of all antiquity, Gnosticism had appeared more than half a century before St John wrote his Epistles and Gospel; and had become an inveterate, an increasing, and a dangerous error, in different parts of Asia, where he and Ignatius and Polycarp lived. St John wrote his Epistles about A.D. 97: the Epistles of Ignatius and Polycarp were probably written ten years later. The ancient historians, by whom we are informed of the general prevalence of Gnosticism at the end of the first century, leave us in some degree of doubt whether the Unitarianism of Carpocrates and the Ebionites appeared a few years before, or after the letters of Ignatius and Polycarp were composed. Take the earliest date: Gnosticism had arrived at manhood: Ebionitism was in its infancy, and buried in the obscurity of Pella, at that time. If therefore Ignatius and Polycarp have "frequently mentioned heresy and heretics; and like St John with great indignation;" and if it be "evident to every person, who is at all acquainted with the history, learning and language of those times, that they had no persons in view but Gnostics only;" they have followed the line of conduct, that a view of the history of those times would lead us to expect from them: and the negative argument, which has often been moved by Dr Priestley in opposite directions as it best suited his purpose, must necessarily be turned at last against himself.

From the testimony of some ancient writers, we should be led to suppose, that the Nazaræans,

Ebionites and Carpocratians first appeared towards the end of the first century: from others we should infer that they were not in existence till the beginning of the second. In this case, we are obliged to balance these opposite accounts: and in a comparative view of the evidence on both sides, the silence of Polycarp and Ignatius (if they be silent on the subject of the Ebionitish and Carpocratian opinions) must be taken into consideration. Since these two writers have been proved to have been believers in the Divinity of Christ¹, and since they have very frequently treated those Gnostic heretics with severity, who are known to have been in considerable numbers in their time, without ever alluding to the opinions of the Ebionites, Nazaræans, or Carpocratians—(about whose existence at the end of the first century there is some previous doubt)—it is on this account probable, either that these sects were not in existence in their time, or that they were very inconsiderable, and confined to some remote, or obscure countries, without having appeared *in any of the churches, to which their Epistles were addressed.*

¹ See the preceding Chapter.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE INTERPRETATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT, BY THE FIRST GENTILE CHRISTIANS, COLLECTED FROM THEIR RELIGIOUS OPINIONS.

1. Hymns, in which the Divinity of Christ was celebrated, appealed to A. D. 220. as compositions of the first age of Christianity. Hymns used in the religious assemblies of Christians, A. D. 260. discarded by Paul of Samosata as modern compositions. The dispute between Christians of the third century on this subject decided by the testimony of Pliny. View of this testimony in connection with other evidence to the opinions of the first Christians on the subject of Christ's nature. 2. General view of the testimony of the writers in the second and following centuries on the same subject. The claims of the Unitarians in the third century to superior antiquity, contradictory and false—immediately refuted by other writers. 3. Statement of Dr Priestley's three arguments to prove Unitarianism the religion of the first Christians. Examination of the last. Christian writers before Justin. Gnostics. Apostolical Fathers. 4. 5. 6. 7. Testimony to the religious opinions of Aristides, Agrippa, Quadratus, Papias, and Aristo of Pella. 8. Only *one* Unitarian *writer* before the time of Justin. All the others, except Cerinthus, either believed in the simple Divinity of Christ, or entertained opinions corresponding to the orthodoxy of the second and third centuries.

I. THE first converts to Christianity were directed by St Paul to sing hymns to their God and Saviour¹: and it is highly probable, antecedently to all testimony, that some of these very first compositions would be used in the Christian Churches, during the first two hundred years, at least, after their introduction. Had any of these parts of the religious service of the first Christians, in which the learned and the unlearned joined, been transmitted down to our times, they would be highly valuable, as far as they exhibited a picture of the opinions of their age. The ancient hymn in our Liturgy² is not

¹ Coloss. iii. 17.

² Te Deum.

sufficiently near the age of the Apostles for our purpose: and it is not certain whether that, which is preserved in the works of Clemens Alexandrinus, and in which the eternity of Christ is taught, be really a composition of the second century; as it is not found in all the copies of Clemens. And were it the genuine production of this writer, the opinions of the Christians of the first century could not be collected from it.

By the united testimonies, however, of an accomplished heathen in the reign of Trajan, and of a Christian writer about 110 years later, it may be proved that the Divinity of Christ was celebrated in the Christian hymns of the first century. This last mentioned writer (who is commonly placed as early as A. D. 212, but might perhaps be ten years later) in his dispute with the Unitarians of his time, confidently appealed to them in proof of the priority of the doctrines of the Church. "All the psalms and hymns, written by faithful brethren from the earliest times, celebrate and ascribe Divinity to Christ as the word of God³." From comparing this passage with another in the thirtieth chapter of the seventh book of Eusebius, it appears, 1. that certain hymns were

³ Ψαλμοὶ δὲ ὅσοι καὶ ᾠδαὶ ἀδελφῶν ἀπαρχῆς ὑπὸ πιστῶν γραφεῖσιν, τὸν λόγον τοῦ Θεοῦ τὸν Χριστὸν ὑμνοῦσι θεολογοῦντες. Euseb. Hist. L. v. c. 28. He first appealed against the Artemonites to the Scriptures, θεῖαι γραφαί; in which the works of three of the Apostolical Fathers were often included; he then mentioned a few of the writers in the second century, before the time of Zephyrinus, in whose works the Divinity and pre-existence of Christ were taught; and lastly he appealed to the ancient hymns.

used by the Christians of the third century in their religious assemblies, which were commonly believed to be ancient compositions. 2. That, about A.D. 260, an Unitarian appeared, who was guilty of several irregularities both in his opinions and conduct, and who suppressed the use of these hymns in his own church; pronouncing them supposititious compositions of the more modern Christians. Neither he, it must be observed, nor the members of the church appear to have assigned any reasons in favour of their respective opinions on the subject of the age of these poetical pieces.

3. From the rejection of the hymns used in the third century by Paul of Samosata, a believer in the simple humanity of Christ, as well as from the positive declarations of the Trinitarians, we may conclude with certainty, that they contained the doctrine of Christ's Divinity. Their antiquity is the only point in dispute.

Caius, or whoever was the writer cited by Eusebius, asserted, that hymns of this description had been written in the first age of Christianity, and that they existed in his time. Paul of Samosata affirmed, that the hymns used in the Church *in his time* were not ancient. These accounts are not absolutely inconsistent with one another: but had he even contended, in direct opposition to Caius, that no such compositions had appeared in the first century, both these persons might be reasonably supposed to be influenced by prejudices in favour of their respective religious systems; and it would be proper to settle

the dispute between them by calling in an impartial and competent witness, under strong obligations to relate the truth, and without any temptations to distort, or suppress it. Such a witness we have in Pliny, in his letter to Trajan on the subject of the Christians in his province of Bithynia: from whose testimony it appears, that the Christians of his time, and many years before it, by their own acknowledgement, were accustomed to sing a hymn to Christ as God¹.

According to Baronius, this letter was written A. D. 104. Pagi, Basnage, and others have placed it with more probability in A. D. 110, i. e. about sixty-seven years after the establishment of Christianity. Pliny collected his account of the customs of the Christians from some who had quitted their religion several years before this time, and from one, who had ceased to be a Christian twenty years, i. e. about forty-seven years after the resurrection of Christ. What was an established custom, while these persons professed the Christian religion, must have existed at a still earlier period. The testimony of Pliny will therefore prove the Divinity of Christ to have been acknowledged by the very first Christians in Bithynia.

¹ Propositus est libellus sine auctore, multorum nomina continens, qui negant se esse Christianos, aut fuisse—ergo dimittendos putavi. Alii ab indice nominati esse se Christianos dixerunt: et mox negaverunt, fuisse quidem, sed desiisse: quidam ante triennium, quidam ante plures annos, non nemo etiam ante viginti quoque. Omnes et imaginem tuam, Deorumque simulachra venerati sunt: ii et Christo maledixerunt. Adfirmabant autem, hanc fuisse summam vel culpæ suæ, vel erroris, quod essent spliti stato die ante lucem convenire, carmenque Christo quasi Deo dicere secum invicem. Pliny, L. x. Ep. 97.

Mosheim says that he dares not determine the force of the expression, "Quasi Deo;" because it is uncertain whether Pliny has given us the language of the Christians, or his own¹. And whether the Christians considered Christ as one with God the Father, or a totally distinct intelligence; whether they believed him to be a being of some subordinate nature, or not, cannot be determined by this single testimony: we can only be certain, that they ascribed Divinity to him in some sense or other. But, when the letter of Pliny is viewed in connection with the whole of the evidence to the opinions of the Apostolical Fathers, and the Christians in general of the first century, and also with the account of the Christian hymns of the first century by the writer just cited, who affirms that Christ was celebrated in them as the Word of God; when it is recollected, at the same time that, in the very first Christian writings after the time of Pliny, A. D. 140, about whose authenticity and purity there is no question, Christ is represented as the Son of God coeternal and consubstantial with the Father; the opinions of the Christians of the first century must be considered as completely determined, without the necessity of recurring to further evidence.

II. I shall just notice, however, another class of evidence, without stating it at length. The general testimony of the writers of the second, third, fourth and following centuries, to the state of opinion among

¹ De Rebus ante Constantinum, p. 148.

the Christians of the first, is so full, consistent and clear, that, when we consider the means of information, which they possessed, and when we know that ancient documents then existed, which are now lost, and by which a groundless claim might probably have been instantly refuted, we might rely on them, without much fear of being misled.

Their testimony stands thus: The Church, the great body of Christians, τὸ πλῆθος², believed in the pre-existence and Divinity of Christ; which doctrines, as well as others, it had received from the Apostles, before any heresies existed³. Of the Christians called heretics, the great body believed in the simple Divinity of Christ, denying the reality of his human body; which faith had also prevailed almost from the very first establishment of Christianity. During the first forty or fifty years, all Christians were of one or the other of these persuasions.

In the beginning of the second century, according to some accounts—at the end of the first, according to others—and after the seventieth year of the Christian æra, according to all—a few Christians appeared, who

² Origen cont. Cels. L. v. p. 272. Ed. Spencer.

³ Hegesippus, ap. Euseb. Hist. L. iv. c. 22.—Irenæus, L. iii. c. 3, 4.—Clemens Alexandrinus, Strom. L. vii. prope finem. Tertullian, Præscrip. adv. Hær. Eusebius, Hist. Eccles. L. iv. c. 7. et adv. Marcellum, passim.

Chrysostom also has ranked Unitarians of both descriptions, Sabellians and Alogians, among heretics—(Tom. ii. p. 233. Ed. Montfaucon. Paris. 1734); and he has declared, that in the time of the Apostles there was no heresy. Τότε τοίνυν, ἡνίκα ἐκήρυττον αὐτοὶ κατὰ τὴν οἰκουμένην ἅπασαν, αἵρεσις οὐδεμία ἦν. Ser. 61. oper. Vol. v. p. 809. citat. a Priestley, History of early Opinions, Vol. iii. p. 261. Yet, Dr Priestley actually asserts, that even “Chrysostom considered almost all the Christians as being Unitarians in the age of the Apostles.”

asserted the simple humanity of Christ. Even they never thought (and this is the only point, about which we are concerned at present) their doctrines taught in the books of the New Testament¹; but were so far imposed on by some unprincipled teachers as to submit partly to writings improperly sanctified with the names of the Apostles, which are known and acknowledged to have been palpable forgeries, and partly to a copy of St Matthew's Gospel, which some of their leaders had interpolated, mutilated, and *falsified*. This book, the first words of which contained an historical falsehood, was most commonly known under the title of the Gospel according to the Hebrews.

No attempt appears to have been made by any class of Unitarians to refute the claims of the members of the Church to the priority of their opinions, no testimony adduced, no artificial argument constructed, no random assertion advanced, till the beginning of

¹ Will any learned Unitarian of our time undertake to produce an instance of any individual, in the second century, who thought that the Divinity of Christ was not taught in the Gospel of St John? Can it be proved by historical evidence, that any individual before the year 200 (I might fix on a later period) acknowledged the authority of St John's Gospel, and at the same time believed in the simple humanity of Christ? The use, which the Alogians at the end of the second century made of St John's Gospel, appears to have been the same with Dr Priestley's method of referring to the Apostolical Fathers. They cited certain passages from it against their adversaries, without allowing it to be genuine. Compare Lardner, *Hist. of Heretics*, B. II. c. xvii. § 5. and c. xxiii. with Tillemont, under the article *Alogi*. "That there was a sect of Christians (says Lardner) who rejected John's Gospel, &c.—I do not believe." He afterwards observes with more reason; "If there really were some such persons, their opinion would be of little moment, considering the general testimony of the ancients in favour of St John's Gospel, and his first Epistle."

the third century. After this time, indeed, the claims of the believers in the simple humanity of Christ to the antiquity of their opinions highly deserve to be noticed, because they contain their own refutation.

Marcellus of Ancyra, at the end of the third, and the opening of the fourth century, asserted that his system of Unitarianism had been the universal religion of Christians, till Origen (A. D. 230) introduced another doctrine. The Artemonite Unitarians, a little before Origen's age, whose opinions, by the way, were very different from those of Marcellus, contended that theirs had been the universal religion till the time of Zephyrinus, the successor of Victor. Without mentioning the inconsistency and contradiction of these claims, they manifestly could not have been advanced without the most gross ignorance of history, or a shameless disregard of truth; since the Divinity of Christ was taught in the works of Justin, Melito, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, Irenæus and many others before the time of Zephyrinus (without mentioning the writings of the Apostolical Fathers; some of which were publicly read, like the books of Scripture in churches) and since a very distinguished Unitarian had been excommunicated by the immediate predecessor of Zephyrinus.

Contradictory pretensions like these, which were instantly refuted by the members of the Church, are evidently insufficient to weaken, in any degree, the testimony of such writers as Hegesippus, Irenæus, Clemens Alexandrinus, Tertullian and Eusebius.

Irenæus was born in the beginning of the second century, and had conversed with Polycarp, a general bishop over the Asiatic Churches at the end of the first. Hegesippus also must probably have conversed with persons of the first century. He, as well as Irenæus, was a believer in the Divinity of Christ; and he has borne the most ample testimony to the purity of the Church during its first age. Clemens Alexandrinus and Tertullian must also have conversed with persons who had lived near the first century; and their testimony is as full and decisive as that of Hegesippus and Irenæus.

III. Before the general statement of the evidence, in this and the preceding chapter, by which it is proved, that the Christians of the first century were believers in the Divinity of Christ, it would have been proper to have mentioned the reasons which induced Dr Priestley to suppose Unitarianism the belief of the first ages of the Church: it will not however be too late to notice them in this place. They may be reduced to these heads.

1. Unitarians were not censured by St John, Ignatius or Polycarp; though they wrote with great severity against the Gnostics. This is considered as a presumptive proof, that St John, together with these two Fathers, and the great body of Christians in general, of their time, were Unitarians.

This negative evidence has been already examined: and I shall only observe on it at present, that an opposite conclusion might be drawn from

an argument of this sort, with at least as much propriety as the deduction in favour of the antiquity and general prevalence of Unitarianism. Since neither St John, nor Ignatius, nor Polycarp, nor any of the Apostolical Fathers have censured that system of faith which Trinitarians profess, and since no writer of the first three centuries ever ventured to stigmatize Trinitarians with the name of heretics, it would follow, by Dr Priestley's own reasoning, that the Apostolical Fathers were Trinitarians, and that the great body of Christians also in the first three centuries believed in the Divinity of Christ.

2. The second and principal reason assigned for supposing the Christians of the first century Unitarians, is an argument of a very peculiar cast.—It is first fully granted, that the writers and the learned in general in the second and third centuries, from Justin Martyr to the Council of Nice, were believers in the Divinity of Christ. And to avoid the conclusion, which results from the method, commonly followed by historians, of collecting the popular opinions of any age from the general spirit of its writings, it is supposed, and an attempt is made to prove, that the great body of the common people in those two centuries were Unitarians; that they maintained opinions directly opposite to those of the learned of their time; that the teachers were of one opinion, and the people taught of another: on which hypothesis, the opinions of either the people or their rulers and instructors must have undergone a total change: then, on the supposed principle of human

nature, that the common people are *less* liable to change than the learned, it is concluded, that Unitarianism was the universal religion of the very first Christians; and it is next inferred, that no doctrine at variance with this can be taught in the New Testament.

3. A third argument, for supposing the primitive Church Unitarian, consists in an assertion, that Justin Martyr (A. D. 140) was the first *writer* who advanced the doctrine of the Divinity of Christ. All the evidence, I think, which Dr Priestley has produced in different parts of his works, except, indeed, the testimonies of Hegesippus¹ and Chrysostom², falls under one of these three heads.

When a question arises about the opinions of the writers of any period, there are two methods by which it is usually decided: 1. By the internal evidence found in the writings themselves, after due deductions for casual or wilful corruptions, where such deductions are necessary, as in the case of the Epistles of Ignatius: 2. By the testimony of other writers of credit, who had sufficient means of obtaining information. It is by this external evidence, that we learn the opinions of Simon Magus, Cleobius, Basilides, Cerinthus and Valentinus. And by the same sort of evidence, without recurring to their writings, and without laying any stress on their purity, we might determine, with moral certainty, the religious tenets of the Apostolical Fathers.

¹ See p. 120 of this Volume, Note.

² See p. 275. Note.

The writers *before* Justin Martyr, most of whose characters are fully ascertained either by their writings, or the testimony of others, are Simon, Cleobius, Basilides, Clemens Romanus, Barnabas, Hermas, Ignatius, Polycarp, Papias, Cerinthus, Epiphanes, Valentinus, Isidorus, Quadratus, Aristides, Agrippa and Aristopellæus. This is perhaps not a complete catalogue of the writers before Justin; but no one is omitted in it, who had ever the character of an Unitarian.

Justin Martyr, it is asserted, was the first Christian writer in whose works the doctrine of Christ's Divinity was taught. Now of the writers before Justin, whom I have enumerated, we know, by the testimony of antiquity, that Basilides, Valentinus, and most of the other Gnostics, believed in the simple Divinity of Christ, and denied his human nature altogether: this testimony has never been questioned, unless the apologies for the first sects by Beausobre may be said to have called it in question: and by the same sort of evidence as that, by which we discover the tenets of the Gnostics, confirmed by the internal evidence in some of their writings, we are informed of the religious opinions of Clemens Romanus, and the other Apostolical Fathers.

The external testimony to the orthodoxy of the Apostolical Fathers, Dr Priestley has overlooked for no discoverable reason, but because it destroys his hypothesis; and he disposes of the internal evidence of the writings themselves by an assumption, that they are all either spurious, or mutilated, or corrupted, and that the forgeries, corruptions and cur-

tailments have all been purposely on one side. He adopts a mere conjecture of Junius, supposes an error in the only existing MS. of Clemens Romanus, and for παθήματα αὐτοῦ (i. e. Θεοῦ) proposes μαθήματα. He cites, what he terms, the prayer of Polycarp to God the Father, which is preserved in the circular Epistle of the Church of Smyrna, but neglects to mention his conjoint doxology to Christ; and he totally overlooks the testimony of Irenæus, who has identified the religious tenets of Polycarp with his own. The multitude of passages in Ignatius, in which the Divinity of Christ is clearly expressed, he at once strikes out as interpolations, without even attempting to prove the spuriousness of any one of them; and passes over the external evidence without notice, though it is in itself fully sufficient to prove Ignatius to have been a believer in the Divinity of Christ.

The Divinity of Christ is not only taught in the present Greek copy of the Epistle of Barnabas, but in the old Latin translation also. Dr Priestley, however, asks, “Can it be thought at all improbable, that if one person interpolated the Greek, another should make as free with the Latin?”—The Divinity and pre-existence of Christ are also taught in the Shepherd of Hermas. But he removes this difficulty by supposing it to be a work of the second century. Having by this compendious process reduced the Apostolical Fathers to his own theological standard, he next actually reckons on their *silence*, a silence of his own creation, in favour of his own opinions; and confidently affirms, that “we find nothing like

Divinity ascribed to Christ before the time of Justin Martyr." This is the most extraordinary method of conducting an historical inquiry that ever was adopted.

IV. The Apostolical Fathers were not the only writers before Justin, whose opinions coincided with the orthodoxy of their successors in the Church in the second and third centuries. Aristides is called by Eusebius πιστὸς ἀνὴρ¹, the title which he has in some part of his history given to Irenæus and Clemens Alexandrinus, two of the most distinguished champions of the Church: and the old Roman Martyrologium bears the most express testimony to his belief in the Divinity of Christ. "Aristidem Philosophum Atheniensem simul cum Quadrato Apologiam Adriano obtulisse, Eusebius et Hieronymus testantur. *Philosophorum sententiis contextam* eam scribit Hieronymus Epist. 84. ad Magnum. Ob quas quilibet illius particeps fieri desideraret; Catholicus vero Christianus ideo maxime quod Deitas Jesu Christi in illâ egregie fuerit adserta. Ita enim antiquum Martyrologium Romanum.—*Hadriano principi de religione Christianâ volumen obtulit, nostri dogmatis continens orationem (forte rationem) et quod Jesus Christus solus esset Deus, præsentē ipso Imperatore, luculentissime peroravit*²."

V. That the religious opinions of Agrippa coincided with the orthodoxy of later times may be

¹ Hist. L. iv. c. iii.

² Grabe, Spicilegium Patrum, Tom. II. p. 125.

collected with some probability from the testimony of Theodoret:—"Against these," he says, (*i. e.* against some Valentinians) "Agrippa and Irenæus and Clemens the stromatist and Origen contend, contesting *for the truth*¹."

VI. The same may be proved of Quadratus and Papias.—Eusebius speaking of several contemporaries of Quadratus, to whom he gives the title of *θεοπρεπεῖς μαθηταὶ* of the Apostles, specifies the *names* of those "by whose writings," he says, "the tradition of the Apostolical doctrine is still conveyed down to us²;" these are Quadratus, Clemens, Ignatius, Polycarp and Papias. Had it ever been supposed, that any of these writers had been Unitarians, Eusebius, who speaks of Christians of that persuasion with some acrimony, and with great contempt, and in whose works the Apostolical tradition is particularly opposed against Unitarianism, would not have written this sentence, nor indeed any part of the thirty-seventh Chapter of the third Book of his history. Had he entertained the slightest suspicion, that any of these writers had deviated so far from his notions of the true Apostolical doctrine, as to have been believers in the simple humanity of Christ, he, who in this part of his history has not neglected to notice the

¹ Καταγωνίζονται δὲ τούτους Ἀγρίππας, ὁ καὶ Κάστωρ ἐπίκλην, καὶ Εἰρηναῖος, καὶ Κλήμης ὁ στρωματεὺς, καὶ Ὀριγένης τῆς ἀληθείας ὑπερμαχοῦντες. Theod. Hær. Fab. L. i. c. iv.

² Ὡν ἔτι καὶ νῦν εἰς ἡμᾶς δι' ὑπομνημάτων τῆς ἀποστολικῆς διδασκαλίας ἢ παράδοσις φέρεται. Hist. L. iii. c. xxxvii. Comp. c. xxxvi, xxxviii, xxxix.

comparatively trifling error of one of them', would have reprobated any of their heretical opinions with great severity; and instead of an unqualified panegyric on four of these writers, we should have had to witness the language of censure, which he has frequently applied to Paul of Samosata and Marcellus of Ancyra.

VII. The belief of Aristo of Pella (author of the dispute between Jason and Papiscus) in the Divinity and pre-existence of Christ, may be collected from his manner of expounding a passage of the Old Testament; which is casually, and perhaps inaccurately, noticed by Jerom.

Hieronymus in Traditionibus Hebraicis in Genesin³.

“In principio fecit Deus cælum et terram. Plerique existimant, sicut in altercatione quoque

³ The notion of Papias respecting a Millenium, c. xxxix.

⁴ In Tertulliani libro cont. Prax. c. v. diversa prorsus habentur: *Aiunt quidem, inquit, et Genesin in Hebraico, ita incipere: In principio Deus fecit sibi filium. Neque Hilarius in dictis Commentariis alicubi ait, in Hebræo extare; in filio creavit Deus cælum et terram; sed hæc solum in Comment. ad Palm. II. habet—Bresith verbum Hebraicum est. Id tres significantias in se habet, id est, in principio, et in capite, et in filio. Quæ ut Hebraicæ linguæ ignarus scripsit, diversas patrum expositiones pro diversis significationibus vocis Bresith accipiens. Atque MYSTICAM ISTAM principii DE FILIO EXPOSITIONEM AB ARISTONE IN DISPUTATIONE ADHIBITAM FUISSE facile credo: sicut et Clemens Alexandrinus ex Prædicatione Petri eandem protulit, (V. Spicileg. Tom. I. p. 328.) Basilium, Ambrosium aliosque recentiores ut taceam. Ast quod in Hebræo lectum fuerit; *In filio Deus fecit cælum et terram*, uti Tertullianus et Hilarius haud effutiverunt; ita nec ab Aristone dictum, sed Hieronymum in hoc, perinde ut prioribus duobus citandis, memoriæ defectu aut nimia festinatione lapsus puto. Grabe, Spicileg. Tom. II. p. 132.*

Jasonis et Papisci scriptum est, et Tertullianus in Lib. contra Praxean disputat, necnon Hilarius in expositione cujusdam Psalmi affirmat, in Hebræo haberi: *In Filio fecit Deus cælum et terram.* Quod falsum esse ipsius rei veritas comprobatur."

VIII. Justin Martyr, it appears, is so far from being "the first writer that we can find to have advanced the doctrine of the Divinity of Christ," that of the seventeen writers before Justin, whom I have enumerated, all were believers in the Divinity of Christ, except one. It is determined with as much certainty as can mostly be attained in matters of ancient history—

1. That the Gnostics, Simon, Cleobius, Basilides, Valentinus and Isidorus, contended for the simple Divinity of Christ, and denied his human nature altogether.

2. That the Gnostic Cerinthus maintained Jesus to have been a man born of human parents, but that the Christ, who was united to him at his baptism, and by whom his miracles were wrought, was a Divine being.

3. That Epiphanes, the son of Carpocrates, a Gnostic in Adrian's reign, maintained the doctrine of Jesus Christ's simple humanity.

4. That the religious opinions of Clemens Romanus, Barnabas, Hermas, Ignatius, Polycarp, Quadratus, Papias, Aristides, Agrippa and Aristo Pellæus coincided with the orthodoxy of the rulers of the church in the second and third centuries.

CHAPTER XIX.

EXAMINATION OF DR PRIESTLEY'S PRESUMPTIVE EVIDENCE TO PROVE
THE GENTILE CHRISTIANS, IN THE SECOND AND THIRD CENTURIES,
GENERALLY UNITARIANS.

1. Statement of his presumptive evidence to prove Unitarianism the religion of the *common people in the second and third centuries*. 2. Observations on a part of this evidence. 3. Jewish and Gentile Unitarians censured as Heretics in the first writings of Christians professedly on the subject of Heresy. 4. The age of the first Alogians determined. 5. Origin of a new system of Unitarianism. Unitarians considered as Heretics by Clemens Alexandrinus and Tertullian. If Unitarians were *on any account* considered as Heretics in the second century, they were few in number. 6. Recapitulation. Unitarians of every description considered as Heretics in the second century.

I. THE only reason for supposing Unitarianism the religion of the first Christians, on which any great stress has been laid, is contained in that very remarkable argument, which I have more than once had occasion to notice; and which I shall not dismiss without examination.

It is first fully allowed, that from the time of Justin till the Council of Nice, the writers among Christians, the rulers of the church and the learned in general believed in the Divinity of Christ: but, the common people, it is asserted, during the whole of this long period, and even after it, believed Christ to have been a mere man: and thence it is concluded, that Unitarianism was the universal religion of the very first age of Christianity.

An hypothesis so contrary to general experience and common sense, as that of the teachers of any age and the people taught entertaining opposite religious opinions, ought to be supported by a strong body of testimony before reasonable and unprejudiced persons can bring their minds even to doubt on the subject. The presumptive evidence which Dr Priestley has stated, to prove the common people of the second, third and fourth centuries, Unitarians, while the writers were Trinitarians, is this:

1. There was no creed or formulary of faith to prevent Unitarians from communion with what was called the catholic church: the Apostles' Creed containing "no article that could exclude Unitarians¹." This, though it is not easy to see why, is thought a reason for supposing them the majority of Christians.

2. "The very circumstance of the Unitarian Gentiles having no separate name is, of itself, a proof that they had no separate assemblies, and were not distinguished from the common mass of Christians²." This circumstance is also thought to be a proof that they were the majority of Christians³.

3. "Another ground of presumption that the Unitarians were not considered as heretics, or indeed in any obnoxious light, and consequently of their being in very great numbers in early times, is, that no treatises were written against them."—"They were first mentioned without any censure at all, afterwards with very little; and no treatise *was*

¹ Hist. of Early Opinions, Vol. III. c. xiii. p. 235.

² Page 237. ³ Page 241.

written expressly against them before Tertullian's against Praxeas.”—“Theophilus of Antioch, about the year 170, wrote against heresies, but only his book against Marcion is mentioned by Eusebius⁴.”—“He also mentions many of the works of Melito, Bishop of Sardis, but none of them were against Unitarians⁵. Rhodon, he also says, wrote against the Marcionites⁶. We have also the first book of a large work of Origen's against heresy, and—he had no view to any besides Gnostics. Can it be doubted then, that there would have been treatises written expressly against the Unitarians long before the time of Tertullian, if they had been considered in any obnoxious light, or had not been a very great majority of the Christian world⁷.”

“The Apostle John—never censures them” (the Unitarians). “I observed the same with respect to Hegesippus, Justin Martyr, and Clemens Alexandrinus. I now find the same to be true of Polycarp and Ignatius; and that even Irenæus, *Tertullian* and Origen *did not treat the Unitarians as heretics*⁸.”

4. In the forgeries under the name of the Clementine Homilies and Recognitions, in which Unitarian doctrines are put into the mouths of St Peter and Clement, no mention is made of the doctrine of the personification of the Logos. This is thought to be an argument, that this doctrine, which made a principal part of the orthodoxy of the

⁴ Hist. L. iv. c. xxiv.

⁵ L. iv. c. xxvi.

⁶ L. v. c. xiii.

⁷ Pages 252, 253. Anno 1786.

⁸ Letters to Dr Horsley, Part II. p. 47. Anno 1784.

subsequent period, had made but little progress when this book was written: which, as some think, was about the middle of the second century¹.

II. This is the whole of what has been termed the “presumptive evidence that the majority of the Gentile Christians in the early ages were Unitarians.” I will not inquire, whether Unitarians of the second and third centuries, who believed Christ to have been a mere man, born of human parents, would be excluded from the communion of other Christians by a creed, in which Jesus Christ was declared to be the only Son of God, “who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, and born of the Virgin Mary;” because, if it should appear, that they were actually considered as heretics, it is a matter of indifference, whether this was effected by means of a written creed, or without one.

Nor will it be necessary to examine the Clementines, in order to discover whether the Trinitarian doctrine be ever alluded to in them; because we have better evidence of the existence and universal prevalence of that doctrine in the Christian churches, than can be derived from a single forgery of an uncertain age, and by an unknown author. On this subject, however, we may just notice one instance of the ambidextrous management with which Dr Priestly conducts his historical inquiries. All his readers must have noticed a very remarkable use to which he has turned the negative argument, in

¹ Hist. of early Opinions, Vol. III. p. 254.

different parts of his History of early Opinions, and in some of his other controversial writings. Neither St John, he has affirmed, nor Ignatius, nor Polycarp censured Unitarians in their writings; and Gentile Unitarians, he contends, were not publicly and directly censured till the end of the second century by Tertullian. From this supposed *silence* of the first Christian writers on the subject of Unitarianism he concludes, that St John, Ignatius and Polycarp, (though, in Ignatius, Christ is frequently called God) together with all the Christians of their age, except Gnostics, were Unitarians; and that the great body of the Christian people through the whole of the second century continued in the profession of the same faith: but, when he comes to consider the silence respecting Trinitarian opinions in the Clementine homilies, he draws an opposite conclusion, and is disposed to infer, that these opinions are not noticed, because they “had made but little progress².”

III. It is asserted that the Unitarian Gentiles had no separate name; that Unitarians were not censured by St John, Polycarp, Ignatius, Hegesippus, or Clemens Alexandrinus; and “that even Irenæus, Tertullian and Origen did not treat them as heretics.” The circumstance of Unitarians being distinguished

² “What is particularly remarkable relating to this work is, that—it contains *no mention* of that doctrine, which made so great a figure afterwards, and which in time bore down all before it, viz. that of the personification of the Logos. No person, I should think, could peruse that work with care, without concluding, that the orthodoxy of the subsequent period had made but little progress then.” Hist. of early Opinions, Vol. III. p. 254.

by no particular name, and having “no treatises written against them,” is thought to be a presumptive argument, that they were not considered as heretics, not separated from the Church, and consequently of “their being in very great numbers in early times.”

In the year 1784, Dr Priestley asserted, that Tertullian and Origen had not treated Unitarians as heretics: in the year 1786, he affirmed, that Tertullian was the first person who wrote expressly against them, in a treatise, where they are several times called heretics, and treated with extraordinary severity: and after having repeatedly denied, that Irenæus (A. D. 170,) had considered the Ebionites as heretics, he at last, in the year 1789, retreated from this ground; and acknowledged, that Bishop Horsley had produced a passage, in which Irenæus calls them heretics, and which he had overlooked¹.

The origin of the Carpocratians, Cerinthians and Ebionites, (including under this name two or three petty sects of Jewish Christians, as Origen seems to have done,) is placed by all the ancient historians, who have treated on the subject of their antiquity, at the end of the first, or the beginning of the second century. I have mentioned the Cerinthians, because they are sometimes, though improperly, considered as Unitarians. No testimony of any writer of credit, or, I believe, of any ancient writer whatever, can be produced, in which any Unitarians are said to have existed before these sects. St John wrote his Epistles and Gospel either a few years

¹ Letters to the Bishop of St David's, Part III. p. 32.

before, or after the appearance of the Ebionites; and it has been a very common opinion, from the time of Irenæus to this day, that he, as well as Ignatius, indirectly attacked their opinions. And as far as teaching a doctrine opposite to theirs may be called opposing their opinions, so far St John in his Gospel, and Ignatius, will be generally allowed to have written against the Ebionites: but whether they had these sectaries in view when their books were composed, is very doubtful: and it is a question, which almost equally admits of dispute, whether any of them existed before the death of the Apostle. Some of the first Christian writers, however, after Ignatius, wrote professedly against heresies: none of the surviving works of Justin are on this subject: the work which, he informs us², he wrote against all heresies, is unfortunately lost: but we know, that the sects of Jewish Christians, who believed in the simple humanity of Christ, were attacked in it. On the testimony of Eusebius, Dr Priestley very reasonably admits, that Theophilus of Antioch and Rhodon wrote against the Marcionites; and, on the authority of Theodoret, we are also compelled to conclude, that Justin, (A. D. 140) in his work on heresies, censured the sects of Nazaræans and Ebionites³. To the Carpocratian, Nazaræan and Ebionæan Unitarians, I know not whether the Ophites or

² Eusebius Hist. L. iv. c. xi.

³ Κατὰ τούτων συνέγραφεν Ἰουστίνος ὁ φιλόσοφος καὶ μάρτυς, καὶ Εἰρηναῖος ὁ τῶν Ἀποστόλων διάδοχος, καὶ Ὠριγένης. Theodoret.

Haer. Fab. L. ii. c. ii.

Sethians of Adrian's time are to be added: but, excepting these, there are no discoverable traces of any individual believing in the simple humanity of Christ before the end of the second century, when the Alogi appeared. The Carpocratians were Gentile Christians¹ (for we must not be led, by an erroneous interpretation of Hegesippus by Valesius², to think them Jews), and though Carpocrates himself perhaps lived in the first century, his followers acquired no distinction till the time of Adrian, when the abilities of his son brought them into notice. Soon after this, in the very *first* work of Christian antiquity on the subject of heresies³, which has come down to us, the Ebionites, Carpocratians, Cerinthians and Sethians are classed among heretics, and censured with great severity. In this work the Carpocratians are placed in chronological order before the others.

A small fragment of the *first* Christian historian, who was contemporary with Irenæus, is preserved in Eusebius: and in this also the first Gentile Unitarians, the Carpocratians, are ranked among heretics. This writer, it appears, while treating on the Church of Jerusalem, was led by his subject to mention the original stocks of the heresies, which prevailed in his own time, and by which the Christian Church had been disunited. As his work was not professedly written on the subject of heresies, and as his only

¹ They rejected the Law of Moses. See Epiphanius, p. 53. Ed. Petav. Colon. 1682.

² Euseb. Hist. L. iv. c. xxii.

³ Irenæus.

purpose was to give some account of their origin⁴, without entering on the subject at large, like Irenæus, he has only mentioned the Carpocratian Unitarians; and has left it to other authors to trace out the variations, which their doctrine received, in the succeeding sects of Cerinthians and Ebionites. Though the Carpocratians are found in his short catalogue, in which only eleven sects are mentioned, Dr Priestley has affirmed, that “Hegesippus, the first Christian historian, enumerating the heresies of his time, mentions several of the Gnostic kind, but, *not that of Christ being a mere man*”⁵.”

The gradations, through which Dr Priestley reluctantly descended on the subject of the testimony of Irenæus, deserve also to be noticed.

1. He affirmed, that Unitarians in general were not censured as heretics by this writer:—“Irenæus, Tertullian and Origen did not treat the Unitarians as heretics”⁶.”

2. He asserted of the Ebionites in particular, that Irenæus had indeed expressed some dislike of their doctrine, but, that he had not treated them as heretics:—“I have observed that Tertullian is the first Christian writer who expressly calls the Ebionites *heretics*. Irenæus, in his large treatise concerning *heresy*, expresses great dislike of their doctrine; but he never confounds them with the heretics”⁷.”

⁴ Τῶν κατ’ αὐτὸν αἰρέσεων τὰς ἀρχάς. Euseb. Hist. L. iv. c. xxii.

⁵ History of early Opinions, Vol. iv. p. 307.

⁶ Letter to Dr Horsley, Part II. p. 47.

⁷ “The whole of this account is inconsistent with Tertullian’s considering Unitarians as heretics.” History of early Opinions, Vol. i. p. 289.

⁷ History of early Opinions, Vol. III. p. 201.

3. "Irenæus's treatise against heresy shews that the Gnostics only were considered as coming under that description. The Ebionites indeed *are censured* in it, but no mention is made of the Gentile Unitarians¹."

4. "In *one* passage however *you think*, that it does appear that he must have considered them (the Ebionites) in that light (i. e. as heretics): but, admitting this, &c."²

5. "I further added, that, if there was any other passage, in which Irenæus called the Ebionites heretics, I had overlooked it. Such a passage, however, your Lordship now produces, p. 455, for among *other heretics* he there enumerates the Ebionites³." "But this is of no consequence to my argument, &c."—"To have been consistent with himself, Irenæus *ought not* to have considered the Ebionites as heretics⁴."

After holding out so long, and surrendering with but an ill grace, it might seem, that the reason, why the Ebionites were considered as heretics in an early age, was not very obvious. How surprised are we then at the next step!

6. "There is an *evident reason*, why the Ebionites were *pretty soon* considered as heretics⁵"—"and a reason which did not affect the Unitarians among the Gentiles. For the Jewish Christians, on account of their using a different language, held separate assemblies from those who used the Greek tongue; and besides Jerom expressly says, they were deemed heretics *only* on the account of their attachment to the

¹ Vol. III. p. 252.

² Letter to Parkhurst, p. 179.

³ Letters to the Lord Bishop of St David's, p. 32.

⁴ Id. p. 35.

⁵ Id. p. 33.

institutions of Moses.”—The objection from Jerom has been long since answered by Dr Horsley; and it is clear, that Irenæus deemed the Ebionites heretics for receiving only one Gospel, for considering Christ as a mere man, and for insisting on the necessity of observing the Mosaic ritual.

7. Dr Priestley still maintains, that “Irenæus makes no mention of any Gentile Unitarians in his works against heresy, but only of the Ebionites⁶:” but, at some future period, after taking a few more steps, he will perhaps grant, that the Carpocratians were not Jews; that they are the only Gentile Unitarians of whose existence in the beginning of the second century we have any evidence; and that they are very severely censured by Irenæus, and ranked by him among heretics, in a treatise written professedly on the subject of heresy.

IV. Dr Priestley has imagined a body of Unitarians long before the time of Theodotus (A. D. 190), to whom Epiphanius, at last, gave the appellation of Alogi: and, as they were not marked by any distinguishing title by any preceding writer, he concludes, that they were not considered as heretics, and therefore, that they must have formed the majority of Christians. This is his favourite use of the negative argument: if ever he can discover a period in which no mention is made of Unitarians, in that period he sets them down at once as the majority of Christians. This argument was however turned

⁶ History of early Opinions, Vol. III. p. 291.

the other way by Dr Lardner, on this very same subject: from the silence of Irenæus, Eusebius and all other ancient writers before Philaster and Epiphanius, respecting the Alogi, *he* concluded that they had no existence¹. There was no reason for Lardner to suppose that these two writers had dealt in fiction: for it is not a heresy, which was ancient about A.D. 190, that Epiphanius has described under the title of Alogi, but a sect which sprang into existence under different leaders (who, with their respective followers, are classed together by Epiphanius under this general name) about A.D. 190. They are not indeed in the catalogue of Irenæus, because they had not appeared when he wrote; but, they are very fully described in Eusebius, though they were not known, in his time, under a more general appellation than that of the Artemonites.

Towards the end of the second century, several Unitarian teachers appeared, who maintained the simple humanity of Christ, and denied the eternity of his existence as the λόγος of the Father. An anonymous writer (supposed to be Caius), quoted by Eusebius, appears to have considered Theodotus as the first of these². Theodoret seems to have placed Artemon before him³: and it is still a petty subject of dispute, to which leader the origin of this sect is

¹ "It is time to deliver my own opinion, which is, that this is a fictitious heresy.—There is not any notice taken of them in Irenæus, Eusebius, or any other ancient writer before Philaster and Epiphanius." History of Heretics, B. II. c. xxiii. § 2.

² See Euseb. Hist. L. v. c. xxviii.

³ Theodoret. Hær. Fab. L. II. c. iv, v.

to be ascribed. Whether Artemon, or Theodotus, or Asclepiades, or Hermophilus, or Apollonius first began to teach the Unitarian doctrine towards the end of the second century, is a question which perhaps cannot, and certainly needs not be decided. Epiphanius, it should seem, like other writers, considered them all as living about the same time; but he has not placed Theodotus first. He has given a general description of the whole body of the Alogi, which consisted of several parts; and as the Artemonites, who make so conspicuous a figure in the ancient history of the Church, are not mentioned in his catalogue, they must be considered as included under the more extensive title of the Alogi, and his suffrage is perhaps indirectly given to the precedence of Artemon before Theodotus; who is described by him as an *ἀπόσπασμα* of the Alogi⁴.

However this may be, that the whole heresy of the Alogi arose about the age of Theodotus, and not in any early period, as Dr Priestley supposes, may be proved with the utmost certainty. Montanus, the father of the Cataphrygian heresy, began his prophecies, A. D. 171, or 172. In fixing on this date, learned moderns, as Lardner has observed, have generally submitted to the authority of Eusebius⁵. Pearson and Beausobre have followed Epiphanius, who says that Montanus set up his pretensions in

⁴ Ἀνέστη πάλιν Θεόδοτος τις, ἀπόσπασμα ὑπάρχων ἐκ τῆς προειρημένης Ἀλόγου αἵρέσεως, τῆς ἀρνούμενης τὸ κατὰ Ἰωάννην Εὐαγγέλιον. Hær. LIV. § i.

⁵ Euseb. Chronicon. Ann. xi. Marc. Antonin. et Hist. Eccles. L. iv. c. xxvii.

the 19th year of Antoninus Pius, i. e. A. D. 156¹. Lardner has mentioned only one modern writer, (Barratier) who has imagined, that Montanus appeared as early as A. D. 126.

Out of his sect grew another, that of the Quintilians²: which was *followed* by a third, whose tenets were composed of the errors of both, to which the name of Quartodecimans (Τεσσαρεσκαίδεκατιται) was given³. And at last “*sprang up in order after*” the Phrygian, Quintilian and Quartodeciman heresies, the sect of the Alogi⁴.

If we allow only a very few years to have intervened between these sects, as they successively arose, we cannot, on any reasonable supposition, place the origin of the Alogi long before the year 190. It is more probable that they appeared very soon after that year than much before it: and thus the hypothesis of Dr Priestley on the antiquity of the Alogi, which rests solely on the testimony of Epiphanius, is completely destroyed by the very writer, who was imagined to have given it his support.

V. From the time of Justin (the first father, the genuineness and purity of whose writings Dr

¹ Epiph. Hæc. XLVIII. § i.

² Κυντιλλιανοὶ δὲ πάλιν— οἱ αὐτοὶ μὲν ὄντες κατὰ Φρύγας, καὶ ἐξ αὐτῶν ὀρμώμενοι. Epiph. Hæc. XLIX. § i.

³ Ἀπὸ τούτων τῶν δύο αἵρέσεων ὁμοῦ ἀλλήλαις μιχθειςῶν, κατὰ φρύγας τε καὶ Κυντιλλιανῶν, ἀνέκνυε πάλιν τῷ κόσμῳ ἑτέρα αἵρεσις Τεσσαρεσκαίδεκατιτῶν, οὕτως καλουμένη. Hæc. L. § i.

⁴ Καθεξῆς δὲ τούτων τῶν αἵρέσεων, μετὰ τὴν κατὰ φρύγας τε καὶ Κυντιλλιανούς, καὶ Τεσσαρεσκαίδεκατίτας οὕτω καλουμένους, ἀνεφύη τῷ βίῳ αἵρεσις ἑτέρα. Hæc. LI. § i.

Priestley has admitted: for he supposes even the Epistle of Clemens Romanus corrupted) to Tertullian, Unitarians were classed among heretics. Clemens Alexandrinus (A. D. 180) wrote no treatise professedly against them, but he has incidentally noticed the Carpocratian heresy⁵, and some are of opinion, that he has also mentioned the Ebionites under the title of the Peratic heresy, among a few other sects whose names he has introduced in the seventh Book of his Stromata. This, however, is questionable: the Περᾶτικοί of Clemens are perhaps the same with the Περᾶται of Theodoret⁶.

Whether this be so, or not, Clemens excluded all, who were not believers in the Divinity of Christ, and Trinitarians, from the Church. He affirms that there is but one true Church, for whose superior antiquity he contends⁷: the opinions of the Church were his own: and “he not only mentions three divine persons, but invokes them as one only God⁸.”

The age of Tertullian is memorable for the appearance of two opposite systems of Unitarianism, in one of which Christ was debased to a mere human being, while the professors of the other studied to exalt his nature to a perfect identity, in person as well as substance, with God the Father. That the first of these systems was the popular, and the second

⁵ Ἡ τῶν Καρποκρατιανῶν αἵρεσις. Strom. L. III. sub initio.

⁶ Hær. Fab. L. I. Hær. XVII.

⁷ Ἐκ τῶν εἰρημένων ἄρα φανερόν οἶμαι γεγενῆσθαι, μίαν εἶναι τὴν ἀληθῆ ἐκκλησίαν τὴν τῷ ὄντι ἀρχαίαν. Strom. L. VII. prop. fin.

⁸ Pædag. L. I. c. VIII. and L. III. c. XII See Du Pin, on Clemens Alex.

the philosophical Unitarianism of antiquity, is a mere dream of Dr Priestley's, unsupported by the slightest evidence. It appears, on the contrary, that the latter was beyond all comparison, the more popular scheme of the two; and that they were only the advocates of the former, who were accused of philosophising¹.

At Byzantium, Theodotus contended for the simple humanity of Christ, about A.D. 190. Artemon advanced the same doctrine a little before, or after Theodotus: several other teachers appeared about the same time, agreeing altogether, or in part at least, with these two Unitarian leaders. The instant that the opinions of these Alogi were published, they were treated as heretics: Theodotus was excommunicated by Victor, the doctrines of the whole sect were exposed by a writer quoted by Eusebius, and they appear to have been actually extinguished for a considerable time²; since no trace of them can be discovered for some years, and since Paul of Samosata is said to have *revived* their heresy in the latter part of the third century³.

Praxeas had no sooner begun to preach his Unitarian doctrines at Carthage, which are represented by contemporary writers as totally different from those

¹ Hoc cæteris observatu dignius est, quod Theodotiani seu Artemonitæ Philosophiæ ac Geometriæ magnum statuisse pretium, immo majus quam sacri codicis et religionis dignitas ferebat. Mosheim, de Reb. ante Constant. p. 430.

² Pauca de his sectis, quæ cito *periisse* videntur, memoriæ prodita sunt. Mosheim, de Reb. ante Constant. p. 430.

³ Τούτων ἔν τινος σπονδάσµατι κατὰ τῆς Ἀρτέµωνος αἰρέσεως πεπονηµένῳ, ἣν αὐθις ὁ ἐκ Σαµοσάτων Παῦλος καθ' ἡµᾶς ἀνανεώσασθαι πεπεύραται. Euseb. Hist. L. v. c. xxviii.

of Theodotus and Artemon, than he was refuted, by Tertullian as it is commonly supposed, and obliged to sign a recantation, which was preserved by the ruling members of the Church: and the “*avenæ Praxeanæ*” seemed to be entirely eradicated⁴. The treatise, which he afterwards wrote against the Praxeanites, is still extant; and we may judge of its effect by the orthodoxy of the Carthaginian Church some years after his death: where Cyprian, his admirer and follower, ruled with uncontrolled sway.—Tertullian, in other parts of his works, speaks also of the *Ebionites*, as heretics:—*Ebionis Hæresis est, et eos in Epistolâ (Johannes) maxime Antichristos vocat, qui Christum negarent in carne venisse, et qui non putarent Jesum filium Dei: illud Marcion, hoc Hebion vindicavit*⁵.

From the pertinacity with which it was for some time maintained, that Unitarians were not reckoned heretics in the second century it might be imagined, that this is a question which requires learning and critical skill to decide. To any one who has looked into Irenæus, it is just such a critical question as to determine, whether Dr Priestley, in his Biographical Chart, has ranked Bacon and Newton among philosophers. It is not however very difficult to account for Dr Priestley's reluctance to concede this point to his adversaries. For, after it is once granted, that Unitarians were ranked among heretics in the second and third centuries, particularly by Tertullian, it

⁴ Vid. Tertull. adv. Praxeam, sub initio.

⁵ Præscrip. adv. Hær. p. 119. Ed. Basil. 1539.

follows that, so far from forming the great body of Christians, they bore only a small proportion to those, who were separated from the Church: since the same Tertullian, who esteems Unitarianism heretical, declares the Valentinians the most numerous body of heretics¹.

VI. Upon the whole, it appears from history, that a few individuals first appeared at the end of the first, or the beginning of the second century, who insisted on the simple humanity of Christ. Against these, some passages in the writings of the Apostle John and Ignatius have been very commonly supposed to be directed: but this, it must be allowed, is rather doubtful: and it is certain, that they are less frequently and less strongly censured than the Gnostics. The reason is obvious. If they were in existence at the end of the first century, they must, at any rate, have been few in number, obscure, and despised: whereas the Gnostics had flourished for some time, and were numerous, proud and insolent. Unitarians, however, increased in the beginning of the second century, and Justin Martyr, perhaps about half a century after their very first appearance, wrote against the Ebionites; as we are informed by Theodoret. Soon after his time, Hegesippus A.D. 170, wrote against the Carpocratian Unitarians; whom we find mentioned in his short catalogue of heresies. And Irenæus his contemporary, though he wrote immedi-

¹ Valentiniani frequentissimum plane collegium inter hæreticos. Tertull. adv. Valentinianos, initio.

ately against the Valentinians, has ranked Ebionites, Carpocratians and Cerinthians among heretics: and their belief in the simple humanity of Jesus is one of the tenets by which he has considered them all as distinguished from the Church. About the year 190, a new sect of Unitarians arose, consisting of several branches, to which Epiphanius has given the name of Alogi, from their denial of the pre-existence of Christ as the Word of God. Theodotus was one of their most distinguished leaders: but excommunication immediately followed the public declaration of his sentiments: their pretensions were completely refuted by a writer, cited in Eusebius, who lived about A.D. 212, or perhaps 220: and the whole sect seems to have suffered a temporary extinction.

About the time of Theodotus, or rather before it², Praxeas, an Unitarian of a very different description, who, like the Swedenborgians of our time, maintained that Christ was *one*, both in substance and person, with God the Father, appeared at Rome. As he had distinguished himself by detecting the errors of Montanus, and as his tenets were then supposed to be *directly opposite* to that system of opinions, which, in modern times, has been known under the name of Socinianism, he was at first highly encouraged by Victor, who had excommunicated Theodotus³. He

² See Pagi, in A.D. 171.

³ Dr Priestley has employed a section (Hist. Vol. III. p. 303, &c.) to prove, in opposition to the writer in Eusebius, that Theodotus was not excommunicated for asserting the simple humanity of Christ. And the principal reason, which he has brought to overturn one historical fact, rests on the perversion of another.

appears to have had a numerous body of followers, for a time, at Carthage; but his doctrines were soon reckoned heretical, and a violent treatise was written against his sect by Tertullian, about A. D. 205. His opinions were adopted, with little variation, in the beginning of the third century, by Noetus, and soon after by Sabellius: from whom this system became distinguished by the name of Sabellianism; a title, which it still retains. Under every change which it experienced, and by whatever name it was known, its professors were treated as heretics: though some members of the Church, in the third century, were disposed to excuse their errors; as they originated from a desire of exalting the person of Christ to complete and absolute identity with God the Father, instead of debasing him to mere humanity, like the Ebionites, Carpocratians and Artemonites. It has lately been contended, that Unitarians were not ranked among heretics before Tertullian, that they had no distinct names, that no treatises were written against them, and that they were not excluded from communion with the Church; and thence it is inferred, that they formed the majority of Christians.

The whole of this representation is totally inconsistent with history and truth. All the Unitarians of every description, of whose existence we have any

“It cannot be supposed,” he says, “that Victor would have patronized in Praxeas THE SAME DOCTRINE, for which he had before excommunicated Theodotus.” Undoubtedly, if we take for granted, that Praxeas and Theodotus maintained the *same* doctrine, we cannot admit, though history informs us of the fact, that Victor patronized the one, and excommunicated the other.

intimation in the second century, were distinguished by names annexed to their several sects: treatises were written against them, as soon as they attracted notice, some of which are still extant: their leaders were excommunicated, their doctrines controverted, and their pretensions refuted: they were formally placed among heretics by some writers, and incidentally censured by many others: and some of them, we may add, were unjustly calumniated, and treated, as in the case of Praxeas, with unmerited harshness.

CHAPTER XX.

EXAMINATION OF DR PRIESTLEY'S "DIRECT EVIDENCE" TO PROVE THE GENTILE CHRISTIANS, IN THE SECOND AND THIRD CENTURIES, GENERALLY UNITARIANS.

1. Dr Priestley collects the opinions of the Apostolic age, from the opinions of unlearned Christians very remote from that age. 2. He neglects the testimony of heathen writers to the opinions of the great body of Christians in the second and third centuries. 3. Statement of his testimonies from Origen, Tertullian, Athanasius and Jerom. 4. Examination of these testimonies. Origen, Athanasius and Jerom are speaking of a want of knowledge in the common people, not of any error in their faith.—The Fathers, of the second, third and fourth centuries, have not asserted, that St John was the first, who taught the doctrine of Christ's Divinity. 5. Examination of Tertullian's testimony. View of the two kinds of Unitarianism in Tertullian's time. Correction of Dr Priestley's misstatement. The Unitarians of Tertullian are represented by him as *followers of Praxeas*, as Monarchists, not believers in the simple humanity of Christ. View of the circumstances, which occasioned Tertullian's treatise against Praxeas. The Unitarians mentioned in this piece are the common people of the Christians in Carthage, not the world at large, not ancient but converted to this faith in Tertullian's time. Tertullian's testimony to the belief of Christians in general in the Divinity of Christ.

I. THE philosophical writer, whose historical statements I have taken the liberty to examine in this, and the preceding chapter, proposes to discover the true meaning of Scripture, relating to the nature of Christ, by the interpretation of Gentile Christians contemporary with the Apostles, from whom they received their information. This interpretation he intends to collect through the medium of their religious opinions. But their religious opinions he determines neither by the general spirit of the reputed writings of their time, nor by the opinions, nor the

testimony of the writers in the next ages after them; who affirm that the orthodoxy of their own time constituted the prevalent religion of the very first Christians. He allows the testimony of Pliny to have no weight; he has not noticed that of Adrian; nor has he compared, and combined the evidence deducible from these various sources, and drawn his conclusions from a comprehensive view of the whole. To determine the religion of the first century he retreats to the third¹, to the fourth, to the fifth, to the sixth, to any century sufficiently remote from that, whose opinions he attempts to discover. And after having fixed on his first period, a full century after the last of the Apostles, it is observable, that even there, instead of availing himself of all the light which the imperfect literature of that age affords, he takes advantage of all possible obscurity. The writings of some learned and some ignorant Christians of those times are extant at this day. But instead of collecting the religion of the Apostolic age from the men of the third century, who have left the visible images of their own minds in their writings, he appeals to those who have left *no writings* at all; and thus by stepping back into utter darkness, if he fails to defeat, he, at least, hopes to elude his opponents.

II. His method of ascertaining the religious tenets of these unlearned Christians, also deserves

¹ Tertullian wrote his treatise against Praxeas, from which Dr Priestley has collected his first and principal testimony, at the opening of the third century; some time after he had become a Montanist.

notice. It might be thought, that an appeal might reasonably be made to learned and inquisitive heathens, in order to determine, whether the great body of Christians really considered Christ as God, or not: but the heathen testimony on this subject has been either totally suppressed, or not fairly stated. Adrian, it might be supposed, if too late to decide on the opinions and practices of Christians in the first century, might however be brought forward as a witness to those of his own time. Yet Adrian's evidence has been unnoticed. The accusation urged by Celsus against Christians, for worshipping Christ as God, was repeated to disgust, in the treatise which he wrote against them, and never denied by any class of Christians. Yet this accusation has been overlooked. A similar charge was alleged by Porphyry and Hierocles, and never contradicted. Several *Christian* writers also have borne the fullest testimony to the belief of the great body of their contemporaries in the Divinity of Christ. But, whenever any notice has been taken of small parts of this evidence, they have been uniformly perverted.

In addition to the few artificial arguments, to which he has given the name of "presumptive evidence," Dr Priestley has satisfied himself with a very inconsiderable body of direct testimony. From a single passage in Tertullian, he fancies that he has proved the great body of common people among Christians, at the end of the second century, to have been believers in the simple humanity of Christ. From two or three passages in Origen, he finds

Unitarianism to have been the popular religion about the year 230. From a sentence in Athanasius, he discovers that the common people, *after* the counsel of Nice, were Unitarians, in the middle of the fourth century. From a passage in Jerom, he makes a singular discovery respecting the popular opinion of the fifth century: from another in Facundus, he sets down the “*grex fidelium*” in the sixth century as Unitarians¹: and if he would be contented with such sort of “presumptive and direct evidence” as this, he might prove Unitarianism, or any other system of opinions, to have formed the popular religion in any age of the Christian Church. His only direct testimony to the opinions of the common people, *before* the council of Nice, consists in a few passages of Tertullian and Origen—which he has misunderstood; and he has not noticed the great body of evidence, which is found even in these two writers, by which his hypothesis is completely destroyed. Even supposing that he had rightly represented the sense of the passages which he has selected from their works, it surely required far more testimony than is contained in them, to prove so paradoxical a proposition as that of the people taught, entertaining an opinion directly opposite to that of their teachers. An hypothesis, so contrary to general experience, demanded far more support than testimony consisting of only two or three doubtful sentences, aided by a few artificial arguments founded on a series of misstatements of historical facts, which

¹ Hist. of Early Opinions, Vol. III. p. 336.

have been improperly dignified with the name of presumptive evidence.

II. "That the common people," says Dr Priestley, "among Christians were actually Unitarians in the early ages, and believed nothing of the pre-existence or Divinity of Christ before the council of Nice, we have as express testimony as can be desired in the case. These sublime doctrines were thought to to be *above their comprehension*, and to be capable of being understood and received by the learned only. This we see most clearly in the general strain of Origen's writings, who was himself a firm believer and zealous defender of the pre-existence and Divinity of Christ¹."

¹ Καὶ τοῦτο δὲ εἶδέναι ἐχρῆν, ὅτι ὥσπερ ἐστὶ νόμος σκίαν περιέχων τῶν μελλόντων ἀγαθῶν, ὑπὸ τοῦ κατ' ἀλήθειαν καταγγελλομένου νόμου δηλουμένων· οὕτω καὶ εὐαγγέλιον σκίαν μυστηρίων Χριστοῦ διδάσκει, τὸ νομιζόμενον ὑπὸ πάντων τῶν ἐντυγχανόντων νοεῖσθαι. Ὁ δὲ φησιν Ἰωάννης εὐαγγέλιον αἰώνιον, οἰκείως ἂν λεχθῆσόμενον πνευματικόν, σαφῶς παρίστησι τοῖς νοοῦσι τὰ πάντα ἐνώπιον περὶ αὐτοῦ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ.—Διόπερ ἀναγκαῖον πνευματικῶς καὶ σωματικῶς χριστιανίζειν· καὶ ὅπου μὲν χρὴ τὸ σωματικόν κηρύσσειν εὐαγγέλιον, φάσκοντα μηδὲν εἶδέναι τοῖς σαρκινοῖς, ἢ Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν, καὶ τοῦτον ἐσταυρωμένον, τοῦτο ποιητέον. ἐπὰν δὲ εὐρεθῶσι κατηρτισμένοι τῷ πνεύματι, καὶ καρποφοροῦντες ἐν αὐτῷ, ἐρῶντές τε τοῦ οὐραμίου σοφίας, μεταδοτέον αὐτοῖς τοῦ λόγου ἐπανελθόντας ἀπὸ τοῦ σεσαρκῶσθαι, ἐφ' ὃ ἦν ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς τὸν Θεόν. Comment. in Joan. Op. Vol. iv. ed. Delarue, p. 9.

"This, we ought to understand, that, as the law was a shadow of good things to come, so is the gospel as it is understood by the generality. But that which John calls the everlasting gospel, and which may be more properly called the *spiritual*, instructs the intelligent very clearly concerning the Son of God. Wherefore the gospel must be taught both corporeally and spiritually, and when it is necessary, we must preach the corporeal gospel, saying to the carnal, that we

know

“But nothing can be more decisive than the evidence of Tertullian to this purpose, who, in the following passage, which is too plain and circumstantial to be misunderstood by any person, positively asserts, though with much peevishness, that the Unitarians, *who held the doctrine of the Divinity of*

know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified. But when persons are found confirmed in the spirit, bringing forth fruit in it, and in love with heavenly wisdom, we must impart to them the Logos returning from his bodily state, in that he was in the beginning with God.”

Οἱ μὲν γὰρ αὐτῷ τῷ λόγῳ κεκόσμηται· οἱ δὲ παρακειμένῳ τινὶ αὐτῷ, καὶ δοκοῦντι εἶναι αὐτῷ τῷ πρώτῳ λόγῳ, οἱ μὴδὲν εἶδοτες, εἰ μὴ Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν, καὶ τούτον ἐσταυρωμένον, οἱ τὸν λόγον σάρκα ὁρῶντες. Comment. Op. Vol. iv. p. 53.

“Some are adorned with the Logos itself, but others with a Logos which is a-kin to it, and seeming to them to be the true Logos; who *know* nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified, who look at the word made flesh.”

Οὕτω τοίνυν οἱ μὲν τινες μετέχουσιν αὐτοῦ τοῦ ἐν ἀρχῇ λόγου, καὶ πρὸς τὸν θεὸν λόγον, καὶ Θεοῦ λόγον, ὥσπερ Ὡσηὲ καὶ Ησαΐας καὶ Ἰερεμίας, καὶ εἴ τις ἕτερος τοιοῦτον ἑαυτὸν παρέστησεν, ὡς τὸν λόγον κυρίου, ἢ τὸν λόγον γενέσθαι πρὸς αὐτόν. ἕτεροι δὲ οἱ μὴδὲν εἶδότες, εἰ μὴ Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν καὶ τούτον ἐσταυρωμένον, τὸν γενόμενον σάρκα λόγον, τὸ πᾶν νομίσαντες εἶναι τοῦ λογοῦ Χριστὸν κατὰ σάρκα μόνον γινώσκουσι. τοιοῦτον δέ ἐστι τὸ πλῆθος τῶν πεπιστευκέναι νομιζομένων. Comment. Op. Vol. iv. p. 53.

“There are, who partake of the Logos which was from the beginning, the Logos that was with God, and the Logos that was God, as Hosea, Isaiah, and Jeremiah, and any others that speak of him as the Logos of God, and the Logos that was with him; but there are others who *know* nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified, *the Logos that was made flesh*, thinking they have every thing of the Logos when they acknowledge Christ according to the flesh. Such is the multitude of those who are called Christians.”

Τὰ δὲ πλήθη τῶν πεπιστευκέναι νομιζομένων τῇ σκιά τοῦ λόγου, καὶ οὐχὶ τῷ ἀληθινῷ λόγῳ Θεοῦ ἐν τῷ ἀνέωγοτι οὐρανῷ τυγχάνοντι, μαθητεύεται. Comment. Op. Vol. iv. p. 56.

“The multitudes” (*i.e.* the great mass or body) “of believers are instructed in the shadow of the Logos, and not in the true Logos of God, which is in the open heaven.”

Christ in abhorrence, were the greater part of Christians in his time¹."

"It is impossible not to infer from this passage, that, *in the time of Tertullian*, the great body of unlearned Christians were Unitarians. Common sense cannot put any other construction on this passage, and Tertullian is far from being singular in this acknowledgement. It is made in different modes, by several of the Fathers, even *later*" (observe how Dr Priestley flies from the age of the Apostles) "than the age of Tertullian."

"That Tertullian considered the more simple and unlearned people as those, among whom the Uni-

¹ Simples enim quippe, ne dixerim imprudentes et idiotæ, quæ major semper credentium pars est, quoniam et ipsa regula fidei a pluribus diis seculi, ad unicum et verum deum transfert; non intelligentes unicum quidem, sed cum suâ œconomiâ esse credendum, expavescunt ad œconomiam. Numerum et dispositionem trinitatis, divisionem præsumunt unitatis; quando unitas ex semetipsâ derivans trinitatem, non destruat ab illâ, sed administretur. Itaque duos et tres jam jactitant a nobis prædicari, se vero unius dei cultores præsumunt. Quasi non et unitas, irrationaliter collecta, hæresim faciat; trinitas, rationaliter expensa, veritatem constituat. Monarchiam, inquit, tenemus. Et ita sonum vocaliter exprimunt etiam Latini, etiam opici, ut putes illos tam bene intelligere monarchiam, quam enunciant. Sed monarchiam sonare student Latini, œconomiam intelligere nolunt etiam Græci. Adv. Praxeam, Sect. iii. p. 635, ed. Rigalt.

"The simple, the ignorant, and unlearned, who are always the greater part of the body of Christians, since the rule of faith," (meaning, probably, the Apostles' Creed,) "transfers the worship of many gods to the one true God, not understanding that the unity of God is to be maintained but with the œconomy—dread this œconomy; imagining that this number and disposition of a trinity is a division of the unity. They, therefore, will have it that we are worshippers of two, and even of three Gods, but that they are worshippers of one God only. We, they say, hold the monarchy. Even the Latins have learned to bawl out for the monarchy, and the Greeks themselves will not understand the œconomy."

tarian doctrine was the most popular, is evident from his saying, that the tares of Praxeas grew up, while many slept in the simplicity of doctrine²."

"Athanasius also, like Tertullian, acknowledged that the Unitarian doctrine was very prevalent among the lower class of people in his time," i. e. in the middle of the fourth century³.

"This being the language of *complaint*, as well as that of Tertullian, it may be the more depended on for exhibiting a state of things very unfavourable to what was called the orthodoxy of that age. And it was not the doctrine of Arius, but that of Paulus Samosatensis, that Athanasius is here complaining of. These *humble Christians* of Origen, who got no farther than *the shadow of the Logos*, the *simplices*, and *idiotæ* of Tertullian, and the *persons of low understanding* of Athanasius, were probably the *simplices credentium* of Jerom, who, he says, 'did not understand the scriptures as became their majesty.' For had these simple Christians (within the pale of

² Fruticaverant avenæ Praxeanae hic quoque superseminatæ, dormientibus multis in simplicitate doctrinæ. Adv. Praxeam, p. 634.

³ Λυπεῖ δὲ καὶ νῦν τοὺς ἀντεχομένους τῆς ἁγίας πίστεως, ἡ περὶ τῶν αὐτῶν βλασφημιῶν βλάβπτουσα τοὺς πολλοὺς· μάλιστα τοὺς ἡλαττωμένους περὶ τὴν σύνεσιν. Τὰ γὰρ μέγала καὶ δύσκατάληπτα τῶν πραγμάτων πίστει τῇ πρὸς τὸν θεὸν λαμβάνεται. "Ὅθεν οἱ περὶ τὴν γνῶσιν ἀδυνατοῦντες ἀποπίπτουσιν, εἰ μὴ πεισθεῖεν ἐμμένειν τῇ πίστει, καὶ τὰς περιέργους ζητήσεις ἐκτρέπεσθαι. De Incarnatione Verbi, contra Paulum Samosatensem, Opera, Vol. i. p. 591.

"It grieves," he says, "those who stand up for the holy faith, that *the multitude*, and especially persons of low understanding, should be infected with those blasphemies. Things that are sublime and difficult are not to be apprehended, except by faith; and ignorant people must fall, if they cannot be persuaded to rest in faith, and avoid curious questions."

the Church) inferred from what John says of the Logos, and from what Christ says of himself, that he was, personally considered, equal to the Father, Jerom would hardly have said, that 'they did not understand the scriptures according to their majesty,' for he himself would not pretend to a perfect knowledge of the mystery of the Trinity. 'For these simple Christians,' he says, 'the earth of the people of God brought forth hay, as for the heretics it brought forth thorns¹.' For the intelligent, no doubt, it yielded richer fruits."

"From all these passages, and others quoted before, I cannot help inferring, that the doctrine of Christ being any thing more than a man, the whole doctrine of *the eternal Logos*, who was *in God*, and who *was God*, was long considered as a more abstruse and refined principle, with which there was no occasion to trouble the common people; and that the doctrine of the simple humanity of Christ continued to be held by the common people till after the time of Athanasius, or after the Council of Nice. And if this was the case then, we may safely conclude, that the Unitarians were much more numerous in a more early period, as it is well known that they kept losing, and not gaining ground, for several centuries²."

¹ Quod dicitur super terram populi mei, spinæ et fœnum ascendent, referre potest et ad hæreticos, et ad simplices quosque credentium, qui non ita scripturam intelligunt ut illius convenit majestati. Unde singula singulis coaptavimus, ut terra populi dei hæreticis spinas, imperitis quibusque ecclesiæ fœnum afferat. Jerom. in Isai. xxxii. 20. Opera, Vol. iv. p. 118. Priestley's Citations and Translations.

² Hist. of Early Opinions, Book III. c. xiii.

IV. With the Christians after the Council of Nice I have no concern: and Dr Priestley can hardly be serious, when he intimates, that the Unitarian doctrine was very prevalent in the time of Athanasius and Jerom. In one part of his works he has observed—"According to him," (Athanasius) "many persons within the pale of the Church must either have been Unitarians, or have believed the doctrine of the Trinity without understanding it, which" Dr Priestley continues to observe, "is in fact no belief at all³."

It surely may be admitted, that we all frequently believe what we cannot perfectly understand. But, whether this be the case or not, Athanasius certainly thought so. If it be affirmed, that this Father has any where represented the great body of Christians of his time as Unitarians, the assertion is without foundation: but, if it be contended, that, according to him, the great body of Christians believed the doctrine of the Trinity without understanding it, the fact is indisputable. Jerom, Origen, Clemens Alexandrinus and nearly all the Christian Fathers thought the same. The same opinion is, I believe, universally maintained at this moment, and has prevailed in every age of the Christian Church. It is from inattention to one of the most common distinctions, which the ancient Fathers have minutely described, and strongly insisted on, that Dr Priestley has represented Jerom, Athanasius and Origen, as vouchers for the general prevalence of Unitarianism

³ Letter to the Archdeacon of St Albans, p. 81.

in their time. They distinguished between *πίστις* *Christian faith* and *γνώσις*, *perfect Christian knowledge*: to which discrimination Athanasius has directly alluded in the passage just cited. "Things that are sublime and difficult are apprehended by *faith* in God." (*πίστει τῇ πρὸς τὸν Θεόν.*) "Whence, those who are incompetent in *knowledge*" (*οἱ περὶ τὴν γνῶσιν ἀδυνατοῦντες*) "fall off, if they be not persuaded to rest in *faith*." (*τῇ πίστει*), &c. "*Faith*" they defined to be "a summary knowledge of the most necessary truths:" "*Knowledge*" (*γνώσις*) "a strong, and steady illustration of what is learnt by *faith*, a superstructure raised on *faith*, as its foundation, by the instruction of Christ¹." The former, they maintained, might be possessed by all pious persons, by all true Christians: the latter, they thought, fell only to the lot of a *few*². In this *γνώσις* they possessed, in their own opinion, a full conception of the *mysteries* of Christianity; and not satisfied, like the great body of Christians, with believing in the Divinity of Christ, they thought

¹ Ἡ μὲν οὖν πίστις, σύντομός ἐστιν, ὡς εἰπεῖν, τῶν κατεπειρόντων γνῶσις· ἡ γνῶσις δὲ ἀποδείξις τῶν διὰ πίστεως παρελημμένων ισχυρὰ καὶ βέβαιος, διὰ τῆς κυριακῆς διδασκαλίας ἐποικοδομουμένη τῇ πίστει, εἰς τὸ ἀμετάπτωτον καὶ μετ' ἐπιστήμης καὶ καταληπτὸν παραπέμπουσα. Clemens Alex. Strom. L. vii. p. 732. Ed. Paris. Sylburg. Vid. etiam L. v. sub initio.

² Ἡ γνῶσις δὲ αὐτὴ ἡ κατὰ διαδοχὰς εἰς ΟΛΙΓΟΥΣ ἐκ τῶν ἀποστόλων ἀγράφως παραδοθεῖσα κατελήλυθεν. Clemens Alex. Strom. L. vi. citat. a Valesio, Annot. in Euseb. Hist. p. 24. (p. 44. ed. Reading).

Τὴν μὲν ἀκρίβειαν αὐτῆς ἐπιζητεῖν ὀλίγων ἐστὶ, τὴν δὲ πίστιν κατέχειν ἈΠΑΝΤΩΝ ΤΩΝ ΠΡΟΣ ΤΟΝ ΘΕΟΝ ΕΥΠΕΙΘΩΝ. Athanasius de Incarnatione, contra Paul. Samos. Vol. i. p. 592. citat. a Priestley, Letters to the Archdeacon of St Albans, Part ii. p. 82.

that they completely comprehended the manner of his existence, before he was invested with human flesh. Any one, who will turn to the passages cited by Dr Priestley from Origen, will immediately perceive, that it is not any defect, or error in the faith of the multitude of Christians, to which that Father alluded, but a deficiency in their *knowledge*³. That sort and degree of *knowledge* (not of faith) which Athanasius thought it dangerous for persons of low understanding to affect, that sort and degree of knowledge, Origen and Jerom, in the passages cited from them, declare, is not to be found among the great mass of Christians. And not the slightest intimation of the general prevalence of Unitarianism is discoverable in this testimony. In this place, an error may be corrected, which runs through a whole section in the History of Early Opinions. It is there asserted, that "according to the acknowledgement of the Christian Fathers," John was the first, who taught the doctrines of the Divinity and pre-existence of Christ: and a multitude of quotations is produced to prove this position. No such acknowledgement was thought of by the Fathers. On this subject, the New Testament was understood by them as it is understood by us. They found the Divinity of Christ taught by most of the writers of the New Testament before John; and they have cited passages to this purpose, from almost every part of it:

³ Origen (see Comm. in Joan. Op. Vol. iv. p. 5.) also asserted, that only a few could *understand* St John's Gospel: but he never thought of affirming that only a few *believed* it.

but John, they asserted, what is allowed by all, was the first who published to mankind the knowledge of the manner in which Christ pre-existed as the Word of God. None of the disciples, they contended, had taught the Divinity (θεότης) of Christ so *frequently, fully, and clearly* as this Apostle; and he was the first, who explained the θεολογία, the doctrine of the divine λόγος or Word: which, they maintained, none but Christians, with minds more than commonly illuminated, could understand, though all true Christians, on the authority of Scripture, *believed* the truth of the doctrine. Out of thirty quotations from the Fathers, which Dr Priestley has produced, the only one to his purpose is from Marius Mercator, a most inaccurate writer of the fifth century. And in a multitude of passages from preceding writers, in which it is declared, that John first taught the θεολογία of Christ, he has erroneously expressed this term by the English word *Divinity*: though every thing but a formal definition is given of it by Chrysostom¹.

V. In order to understand the passage from Tertullian, it is necessary to recollect the two opposite systems of Unitarianism in his age. The Alogians believed in the simple humanity of Christ. The Monarchists, afterwards known by the name of

¹ Πρώτη ἀνάψασα τὸν τῆς θεολογίας λύχνον, πᾶσαι τῶν περάτων αἱ ἐκκλησίαι πρὸς σε δραμοῦσαι, ἐκάστη τὴν ἐαυτῆς λαμπάδα τὴν θεολογίαν ἄνηψε, καὶ ὑπέστρεψε χαίρουσα, 'ΕΝ 'ΑΡΧῃ. ΗΝ. 'Ο ΛΟΓΟΣ. Chrysost. in Joan. i. citat. a Priestley.

Sabellians, who formed a considerable sect in several parts of Africa, strictly maintained the doctrine of Christ's Divinity, but denied his distinct personality. The term Alogians is sufficiently extensive to comprehend the Ebionites and Carpocratians; though it is confined by Epiphanius to those Gentile believers in the simple humanity of Christ, who first appeared at the end of the second century. The most distinguished leaders of this very inconsiderable sect were Theodotus of Byzantium, Artemon, and Paul of Samosata. Praxeas was the first Monarchist. His successors were Noetus and Sabellius, who maintained, with little difference, the doctrines of their founder. As extremes are often brought to meet, an union was formed between these two opposite schemes; or rather, one system was formed out of both by Marcellus of Ancyra, in the beginning of the fourth century². After which time, *pure* Sabellianism disappeared; and if, with Beausobre, we attempt to collect its principles from the opinions of Marcellus, we shall make the system appear indeed more agreeable to human reason—but we shall not discover the truth. As the opinions of sects, which retain the same name, often change in a few years, the best accounts of the first Monarchists are unquestionably those of contemporary writers. They first appeared about A. D. 190, or

² Marcellus is accused by Eusebius of combining the opinions of Sabellius, Paul of Samosata and the Jews. Μάρκελλος δὲ πάντα φύρας, ποτὲ μὲν εἰς αὐτὸν ὅλον τοῦ Σαβελλίου βυθὸν χωρεῖ, ποτὲ δὲ Παύλου τοῦ Σαμοσατέως ἀνανεοῦσθαι πειράται τὴν αἵρεσιν, ποτὲ δὲ Ἰουδαίους ὧν ἀντικρὺς ἀπελέγχεται. Euseb. cont. Marcell. L. III. c. vi.

earlier. About A. D. 205, Tertullian was their accuser, and about A. D. 230, Origen was in some degree their apologist. Since both these writers perfectly agree with one another, and with many others, in representing them as believers in the Divinity of Christ, in the highest possible sense of the word, no room seems left for conjecture¹. To this evidence no

¹ Origen, alluding to the Monarchists, speaks of those who confound the Son with the Father, under the notion of doing him honour. Οὐ νομιστέον γὰρ εἶναι ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ τοὺς τὰ ψεύδη φρονούντας περὶ αὐτοῦ, φαντασία τοῦ δοξάζειν αὐτόν· ὅποιοί εἰσιν συγχέοντες πατρὸς καὶ υἱοῦ ἐννοίαν, καὶ τῇ ὑποστάσει ἓνα δίδοντες εἶναι τὸν πάτερα καὶ τὸν υἱόν. Comm. in Matt. Op. Vol. III. p. 789. And he accurately distinguishes between the Monarchists and Alógiāns, in these words: Ἦτοι ἀρνούμενους ιδιότητα υἱοῦ ἑτέραν παρὰ τὴν τοῦ πατρὸς—ἢ ἀρνούμενους τὴν θεότητα τοῦ υἱοῦ. “Either those who deny that the identity of the Son is different from that of the Father, or those who deny the Divinity of the Son.” Comm. in Joan. Op. Vol. IV. p. 50. ed. Delarue.

Alluding to the high opinion, which the Monarchists entertained of Christ's Divinity, Novatian says, “Usque adeo manifestum est in scripturis esse Deum tradi, ut plerique hæreticorum *divinitatis ipsius magnitudine et veritate commoti*, ultra modum extendere honores ejus ausi essent, non filium, sed ipsum Deum Patrem promere vel putare.” C. xxiii. p. 87. citat. a Priestley Hist. Vol. II. p. 166.

It would be easy to produce a multitude of authorities, perfectly coinciding with the accounts of Tertullian, Origen and Novatian, to prove that the Monarchists or Sabellians believed Christ to be God the Father; and not a mere man; as Dr Priestley supposes the Monarchists in Tertullian to have believed. Sandius, the Arian champion of the last century, accused the Trinitarians of borrowing their notions of the perfect equality of the Son with the Father from Praxeas, Sabellius and the Montanists. See Spanheim Introd. ad Chronol. p. 197. The same accusation had been urged by Arius himself.

“After Peter, who suffered martyrdom under Diocletian, succeeded Achilles in the bishopric of Alexandria, and to him Alexander:—it happened that he and his presbyters were one day exercising themselves in a disputative way upon the doctrine of the Trinity. Arius, one of his presbyters, a subtle disputant, pretended to be apprehensive, that the *Bishop's discourse* tended to Sabellianism, and *carried his own to a contrary extreme*; alleging, with no little vehemence, that if the Father begot

testimony can be opposed: and the moderns, who have departed a little from the accounts of the ancient writers in their description of Monarchism, seem to have had no other reason, for the deviation, but a persuasion that some articles of their creed, particularly that of the passibility of God the Father, were too extravagant to have been real: whereas their leading tenets are at this time professed by the Swedenborgian Christians: who, if they still profess all the tenets of their founder, are Patripassians in the strictest sense².

The account of these two different systems of Unitarianism, in the "History of Early Opinions," is not only without the slightest foundation in real history, but has all history against it. "Besides the simple Unitarianism above described, or the doctrine of Christ bring a mere man inspired by God, which," says Dr Priestley, "was the belief of the generality of Christians of lower rank, there was likewise, in early times, what may be called a philosophical Unitarianism, or an explanation of the doctrine concerning Christ on the principles of the philosophy of those times. And this deserves the more notice, as it probably gave occasion to what is commonly called the patripassian doctrine; if such a doctrine was ever really maintained³."—"This however would never begot the Son, he, that was begotten, had a beginning of existence; that therefore there was a time when the Son was not." Theodoret. Hist. L. i. c. ii. Parker's Translation. See the testimonies of the Christian Fathers, to the opinions of Praxeas, Noetus, and Sabellius, in Tillemont and Lardner.

² See the Chapters in Swedenborg, "De Domino."

³ History of Early Opinions, Vol. III. p. 376.

apply to any but philosophers. The COMMON PEOPLE ARE DESCRIBED AS SIMPLE UNITARIANS, without having any such whimsical hypothesis as this¹.”— This philosophical Unitarianism *is the doctrine ascribed by Tertullian to Praxeas*; though HE SPEAKS of the common people as simple Unitarians².”

According to this account, Tertullian has ascribed one set of opinions to Praxeas, the Unitarian leader, against whom he wrote, and another to the common people, the *simplices* and *idiotæ*, of whose perversity he complains. This representation is entirely fictitious. The common people of the Carthaginian Christians are described by Tertullian as having just become *Monarchists*, *followers of Praxeas*—*avenæ Praxeane*—*vanissimi Monarchiani*—*Monarchiam, iniquiunt, tenemus*: and he has *no where* intimated, that any considerable body of men, either learned or unlearned, in his time, believed in the simple humanity of Christ.

The occasion and design of the treatise against Praxeas may easily be collected from the treatise itself. Praxeas had distinguished himself at Rome by his confutation of the false prophecies of Montanus: but, soon after, introduced what was thought a heresy of his own, and preached his doctrines with some success: “the tares of Praxeas sown upon” (the true corn) “had produced fruit *here* too” (i. e. at Carthage³). The sectaries, however, were brought

¹ History of Early Opinions, Vol. III. p. 381.

² Page 387.

³ *Fructificaverant avenæ Praxeane hic quoque superseminatæ. Tert. adv. Prax. sub init.*

back to communion with the Church by the exertions of one of its members, probably Tertullian himself, and the heresy seemed eradicated. *Traductæ dehinc per quem Deus voluit, etiam evulsæ videbantur*⁴. Praxeas signed a recantation of his error, and this was lodged in the hands of the members of the Church. After this, a division took place among the latter, owing to the lapse of Tertullian himself into the absurdities of Montanism; Praxeas, or his followers, some of whom, it seems, had concealed, and not abandoned their opinions, seized the opportunity of profiting by this favourable circumstance: and while they assaulted the errors, which the most distinguished leader of the Carthaginian Christians had embraced, assailed with great effect the genuine doctrines of the Church: which thus suffered by their accidental and temporary connection with falsehood. Availing himself of the dissensions among the rulers, the Monarchist leader appears to have addressed the common people with such success, that, if we may credit the violent language of the enflamed Tertullian, all the ignorant persons in the place were converted to his opinions.

Tertullian, not of a temper to permit adversaries, whom he despised, to enjoy a long triumph over his weakness, rose a second time, in full confidence of his own powers, and launched the thunder of his barbarous eloquence against the new sectaries. To expose the errors of Praxeas, and to bring back the deluded people to the true faith, he wrote the vehement

⁴ Vid. Tertull. adv. Prax. sub init.

piece, in which Dr Priestley has lately discerned testimony to the belief of common, unlearned Christians, in the SIMPLE HUMANITY OF CHRIST.—In this treatise, the errors into which *the unlearned Christians of Carthage* had fallen, are explained in a few words. *Ipsum dicit* (Praxeas) *patrem descendisse in virginem, ipsum ex eâ natum, ipsum passum : denique ipsum esse Jesum Christum*¹. After some further observations, Tertullian next describes the Catholic faith, and, like the other Fathers, asserts its priority, not only before “*Praxeas of yesterday*,” but before the first heretics²: observing, that the doctrines of the Church might be supported on the ground of antiquity; that being true which was the original doctrine, that spurious which appeared late³. But, not to rest the matter on this, he undertakes, like other early Christian writers, to show the reasonableness of the doctrine of the Church, to explain how the Trinity is consistent with unity, since the “perversity” of the Monarchists insisted on the unity of God in such a sense as to exclude the distinction of persons in the Godhead⁴.

¹ Adv. Prax. sub init.

² Hanc regulam ab initio Evangelii decucurrisset, etiam ante priores quosque hæreticos, nedum ante Praxean hesternum, probabit tam ipsa posteritas omnium hæreticorum, quam ipsa novellitas Praxeæ hesterni.

³ Quo peræque adversus universas hæreses jam hinc præjudicatum sit, id esse verum quodcumque primum: id esse adulterum quodcumque posterius.

⁴ Sed salvâ istâ præscriptione, ubique tamen propter instructionem et munitionem quorundam, dandus est etiam retractatibus locus: vel ne videatur unaquæque perversitas, non examinata, sed præjudicata damnari; maxime hæc quæ se existimat meram veritatem possidere, dum unicum Deum non alias putat credendum, quam si ipsum eundemque et Patrem et Filium et Spiritum Sanctum dicat. Vid. Tertull. ibid.

How the persons of the Trinity “admit of number,” he says, “without division” (of substance) “the following tract shall demonstrate.” For, “*all the men of simplicity*” (alluding probably to their affectation of simplicity of doctrine, as well as to their ignorance) “not to call them unwise and unlearned, who always form the majority of Christians,” &c.—“hold that two and even three Gods are preached by us, and affect themselves to be worshippers of only one God, as if the unity of God understood irrationally could not form heresy: WE, they say, HOLD THE MONARCHY.”—Tertullian, after this, with much self-complacency, on account of his own superior knowledge of Latin and Greek, (the first was the common language⁶ of the Carthaginian colonists, and the latter was understood and spoken by many individuals in almost every part of the Roman empire⁷) amuses

⁵ Quomodo numerum sine divisione patiuntur procedentes tractatus demonstrabunt. Simples enim quique, ne dixerim imprudentes et idiotæ (quæ major semper credentium pars est), &c. See p. 314. of this Volume—Note.

⁶ Anno ab urbe conditâ 627, Carthago in Africâ restitui jussa, deductis civium *Romanorum* familiis, quæ eam incoletet, restituta et repleta est. Orosius. L. v. c. xii.

⁷ Si quis minorem gloriæ fructum putat ex Græcis versibus percipi, quam ex Latinis, vehementer errat: propterea quod Græca leguntur in omnibus fere gentibus, Latina suis finibus, exiguis sane, continentur. Cicero pro Archiâ.

That the Greek language was understood and spoken by many at Carthage appears from Apuleius, who lived only a few years before the age of Tertullian. Addressing himself to the Carthaginians, he says, “Vox mea utrâque linguâ jam vestris auribus ante proximum sexennium probe cognita.” Florid. 18, p. 813. Ed. Delph.

And, “Ejus Dei (sc. Æsculapii) hymnum Græco et Latino carmine vobis hîc canam.—Hymnum ejus utrâque linguâ canam: cui dialogum similiter Græcum et Latinum prætexui: in quo sermocinabuntur Sabidius Severus

himself with deriding the ignorance of the new converts to Monarchism. "Men," he says, "who speak Latin, even the most illiterate of them, learn to articulate the Greek word *monarchy* so well, that you might imagine them to understand it as well as they pronounce it: but though men, who speak the Latin language, study to sound the Greek word *monarchy*, even Greeks are not disposed to know what *οἰκονομία* means¹. But I, if I have acquired any knowledge of either language," &c.

Such was the state of religious opinion, in the great body of Carthaginian Christians, at the end of the second century. Nearly all were Monarchists, believers in the Divinity of Christ, in the highest possible sense in which the term Divinity can be understood, asserting Christ to be God the Father, and considering the words Father, Son and Holy Ghost, as only three different terms for the same Omnipotent Being. The reign of this opinion is, however, known to have been of short duration; for, in less than fifty years after this treatise was written,

Severus et Julius Persius.—Persius, quamvis et ipse optime Latine possit, tamen hodie nobis ac vobis Atticissabit." p. 818.

"Jamdudum scio, quid hoc significatu flagitetis, ut cætera Latinae materiae persequamur (Schoppius ex Libro Fulvii legebat *Latine narrare prosequamur*). Eam et in principio vobis diversa petentibus, ita memini polliceri, ut neutra pars vestrum, nec qui Græce, nec qui Latine petebatis, dictionis hujus expertes abiretis. Quapropter, si ita videtur, satis oratio nostra Atticissaverit. Tempus est in *Latium* demigrare de *Græciâ*." Florid. 24, p. 830.

¹ Tertullian has before defined *οἰκονομία*. "Unicum quidem Deum credimus: sub hâc tamen dispensatione, quam *οἰκονομίαν* dicimus, ut unici dei sit et filius sermo ipsius, qui ex ipso processerit, per quem omnia facta sunt, et sine quo factum est nihil." Adv. Prax. sub initio.

Cyprian, the admirer and follower of Tertullian, was elected Bishop of Carthage by *the people* and clergy, and governed that Church with the most uncontrolled sway.—This system is known to have prevailed more in Africa than any other part of the Roman empire: and, when the peculiar circumstances which divided and disturbed the Carthaginian Church are considered, it is no wonder that all the ignorant people of the place, to use the hyperbolical language of Tertullian, were for a short time Monarchists. But even at Carthage there is not the slightest trace of an Unitarian, who believed in the simple humanity of Christ, in the time of Tertullian. The Christians of that place were Monarchists, and not Alogians: they believed that Christ was truly one and the same in substance and person with God the Father, not that he was a mere man like themselves.

The notion of Tertullian's testimony to the popularity of the doctrine of Christ's mere humanity has arisen from two enormous mistakes. 1. That Tertullian, in mentioning the objections of simple, ignorant people against the doctrines of the Church, was speaking of the common people in the Christian world at large, instead of those *only* who were immediately under his own eye at Carthage. 2. That Monarchists denied the Divinity of Christ; whereas, in denying his personality to be distinct from that of the Father, they asserted his Divinity in the highest possible degree.—Tertullian, when speaking of the Carthaginian Christians, declares that all the ignorant people (*simplices quique, or idiotæ quisque*) were just

become Monarchists : when he speaks to the opinions of Christians in general throughout the world, he affirms that they *all* held Christ to be God¹. These two accounts are perfectly consistent : but both must unquestionably be understood with some limitation.

It is hardly worth observing, that Dr Priestley, I believe without any authority, reads *quippe* instead of *quique*. The expression “simplices quique” is probably one of Tertullian’s barbarisms, instead of *simplex quisque* or *unusquisque*. He afterwards has it so. *Male accepit Idiotæ quisque aut perversus hoc dictum*². Dr Priestley also seems to have inadvertently ranked Praxeas among the Montanists, though he was their most formidable antagonist³.

¹ “Christi regnum et nomen *ubique* adoratur, omnibus Rex, *omnibus Deus* et Dominus est.” Lib. cont. Judæos c. vii. “Aspice *universas nationes* de voragine erroris humani exinde emergentes ad Dominum Deum creatorem, et ad *Deum* Christum ejus.” c. xii.

² Tertullian. adv. Prax. p. 473. Ed. Basil. 1539.

³ “Many of the Montanists, besides Praxeas, against whom Tertullian wrote, were probably Unitarians.” History of Early Opinions, Vol. III. p. 323.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE INTERPRETATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT, BY THE FIRST GENTILE CHRISTIANS, COLLECTED FROM THEIR RELIGIOUS OPINIONS.

1. The usual practice of Historians to determine the state of opinion in any age by the general spirit of its writings. 2. Reasonableness of this method. If the great body of Christians in the second and third centuries had been Unitarians, many writers would have been Unitarians also. 3. The rulers of the Church could not be professed Trinitarians, while the people were Unitarians, from the nature of the Church government: 4. and from the severity, with which Unitarians were treated. 5. The writings of learned Christians in the second and third centuries would have been of a different cast, if the common people had been Unitarians. 6. Theodoret's testimony to the influence of the Bishops with the common people, before the Council of Nice. 7. The Divinity of Christ taught in hymns used in the religious service, in which learned and unlearned Christians joined. 8. The doctrine of Christ's Divinity proved to have been the prevailing opinion in the second and third centuries, by comparing the different pretensions of Unitarians and Trinitarians in those ages. 9. Unitarians proved to have been inconsiderable in number from the first acts of Constantine after his conversion.

I. THE hypothesis relating to the opposition between the opinions of learned and unlearned Christians, in the second and third centuries, on the subject of the nature of Christ, appears at first sight so extravagant, that nothing but direct, strong, and various testimony would be sufficient to induce an unprejudiced mind to acquiesce in it. But no evidence of this kind has been produced—the passages from Tertullian and Origen, having no connection with the question, on which they have been brought to decide; and the supposition of the Unitarianism of the common people in those early ages

stands at this moment without any testimony whatever in its support. It remains to be seen what the advocates of this whimsical notion will say to the evidence on the other side. Any testimony indeed to prove the common people, in any age, of the religion which was openly professed, and continually taught by the learned, would be superfluous, had not a contrary opinion been maintained by a writer, whose well-earned reputation in some departments of philosophy is almost sufficient to give currency to the most palpable errors, in subjects where his information is less accurate and extensive. Were it not from a consideration of this sort, we might cast our eye over a table of the writings of Christians in the three first centuries, consisting of Letters, Orations, Sermons, didactic, moral and controversial pieces, Apologies, Panegyrics, Histories, and Commentaries: and might very safely *take for granted*, that the *popular* religion was to be found in the general spirit of these popular writings. It is thus that the history of opinion of any age or any people is commonly collected; and it is thus that the religious opinions of Christians in the first ages of Christianity *have been* determined by the most accurate historians.—“*Doctrina Catholica hujus (i. e. secundi) sæculi,*” says Spanheim, “*qualis fuerit certissime colligitur,*

1. Ex scriptis Apostolicis.
2. Ex scriptis Symbolicis.
3. Ex scriptis Apologeticis—Justini, Athenagoræ, &c.

4. *Ex scriptis aliis secundæ hujus ætatis; nempe ex genuinis Justinì, Theophili, Tatiani, &c.*

Ex his omnibus colliguntur articuli fidei Christianæ."

II. It is not without reason, that historians usually determine the state and changes of opinions in any age by the general spirit of its writings. Popular opinions and popular writings are always mutually influenced by each other. If the great body of Christians, before the Council of Nice, had been believers in the simple humanity of Christ, a multitude of books would have sprung out of that generally prevailing opinion, and would have marked the spirit of the age with as much certainty, as words usually describe thoughts, or as the fruit distinguishes the tree. If a few Platonizing Christians in the middle of the second century had really attempted to introduce a doctrine opposite to the sentiments of the majority of their brethren, the Unitarian faith would have been immediately vindicated, against the bold innovators, by some of the common people. Every age can witness what moderate qualifications are necessary to form a writer. And some of the early Christian Fathers were in fact so far removed from the character of philosophers, that they possessed as little science or literature as many writers of our age. In some of their works we might as reasonably expect to find philosophy, as to meet with sound knowledge and rational information in many of the political, and politico-theological pamphlets.

which have been published in England within the last seven years. Several of the Fathers were as ignorant, and obtruded falsehood mixed with truth on their readers and hearers, with as much self-satisfaction, and contempt for others, as some popular orators and writers of the present day. One of the first Unitarian writers was a well-informed artizan of Byzantium; and had a few philosophers attempted to impose a new creed on Christians, every artizan would have been converted into a writer: the Unitarians of that age—that is, all the Christians like the Unitarians of our time—would have exclaimed with the utmost violence against the IDOLATRY of the philosophizing Trinitarians; and instead of treatises against heretics written by the latter, in the name of the Church, we should have had to peruse a mass of matter, the production of the Unitarian *Church*, against the heresy, philosophism and idolatry of the worshippers of Christ. Now, since out of a multitude of volumes before the Council of Nice, only one work is to be found, in which the doctrine of Christ's simple humanity is defended, we may be fully assured, on this account only, that Unitarianism must have been professed by extremely few Christians.

III. It is universally allowed, that the writers, the rulers of the Church, and the learned in general, in the second and third centuries, believed in the Divinity of Christ, and openly taught this doctrine. And, from the connexion which always subsists between the opinions of the learned and the ignorant,

we might have a very strong assurance, that the common people in general held the same tenets with their superiors on this subject. A peculiarity in the constitution of the Christian Church in the first ages raises a high degree of probability to moral certainty.—In the early state of the Church, the Bishops, Presbyters and other ministers were elected to their offices by the whole body of the people¹. The government of the Church before the Council of Nice was elective and representative in the strictest sense. And it ought to be known, that two modern leaders of a body of Christians², who, it is said, are advocates for a very general, if not universal representation of the people in *civil* government, maintain, that the constituents and their representatives were uniformly of opposite opinions for two hundred years, in a government, where the rulers were elected by the people at large: that the people regularly appointed persons to govern, and instruct them, whom they must have thought idolaters.

Dr Priestley's reasoning does not always lead to such strange conclusions. On one occasion, he observes, "the Bishops were Jews, because the people were so." And on the same just principle he ought to have inferred, that the Bishops throughout the whole Christian world in the second and third cen-

¹ Præcipua pars ecclesiæ populus erat, qui potestate valebat episcopum, presbyteros, et ministros designandi, leges ferendi, quæ proponebantur in conventibus vel approbandi, malos et degeneres et excludendi et recipiendi: nec aliquid momenti alicujus, nisi conscio et consentiente populo, decerni et geri poterat. Mosheim, de rebus ante Constant. p. 145.

² Dr Priestley and Mr Lindsey.

turies were believers in the Divinity of Christ, and Trinitarians, because the people, who elected them, were so. Whatever were the opinions of the great body of electors on matters of importance, the opinions of the ecclesiastical magistrates elected would unquestionably be, in general, the same. Or, if it should occasionally happen, that the people raised a person to an eminent situation in the Church, who had the hypocrisy to conceal his sentiments, till after his elevation, such instances would, at any rate, be rare: and the individuals, thus exalted by the mistake of the electors, would be degraded (as we find they were) as soon as their opinions became known¹.

IV. The severity with which Unitarians were treated by the Church, before it became possessed of civil power, proves that its rulers had the people on their side. In a very few years after the origin of the Ebionæan, Cerinthian and Carpocratian sects, they were attacked as heretics by Justin, Irenæus and Hegesippus; excluded from the common privileges, and even the *name* of Christians, and thought to be incapable of future salvation. The only Unitarians, of whose existence any trace can be discovered, were treated with the utmost harshness; and as soon as any member of the Church openly professed his belief

¹ *Athanasius*, after the Council of Nice, was appointed to his Bishopric by the whole multitude of people of the Catholic Church. Πᾶς ὁ λαὸς—ἀνεβόων, ἔκραζον, αἰτοῦντες Ἀθανάσιον ἐπίσκοπον. Ep. Synod. Alex. ap. Athen. Apol. II. T. II. p. 726. citat. a Bingham, *Antiq. Christ. B.* iv. c. ii.—Yet Dr Priestley supposes these people to have been believers in the simple humanity of Christ.

in the simple humanity of Christ, he was immediately excluded from the communion of other Christians, and stigmatized with the name of heretic. Could it possibly have happened, that Theodotus should have been excommunicated, and Paul of Samosata deposed, for maintaining the same opinions with the people in whose hands the controlling power was lodged and frequently exercised?

V. Had the mass of the people been believers in the simple humanity of Christ, the rulers of the Church, elected by them, must also have been Unitarians: and had a few philosophers first ventured to teach Trinitarianism, as it has lately been asserted, about A.D. 140—had they attempted to introduce a new doctrine into Christianity from the writings of the heathen philosophers—it would have been immediately exploded with indignation. The sufficiency of scripture as a rule of faith and morals, would have been insisted on; the heathenism of the new teachers would have been reprobated, and they would have been driven with ignominy from the Church. Can we suppose it possible for congregations of Christians to sit and hear doctrines, which they held idolatrous, continually repeated, without exerting the power, which was lodged in their hands, to prevent such blasphemy? Would they tamely submit to see several members of the Church successively excommunicated, and deprived of all the advantages of Christianity, by a few philosophers, for no other crime than entertaining the same opinions with themselves? Is

it likely that all this should happen, not only without the punishment of the authors of these strange, philosophizing doctrines, who audaciously excommunicated those who opposed them ; but without any public vindication of the rights of a degraded people, insulted by a few philosophers without civil or military power to support their usurpation, and, by supposition, without sufficient influence over their minds to bring them over to their own opinions?

Justin Martyr, it has lately been said, was the first Christian, or one of the first, who introduced the notion of the pre-existence and Divinity of Christ. Had this been really so, Justin would have been reckoned a heretic, instead of being ranked among the most respected, and revered members of the Church¹. — “ If the Divinity and pre-existence of Christ,” it has been justly observed, “ was not a tenet of primitive Christianity, there must have been a period prior to the Nicæan Council, when it was accounted a heresy, and when the non-divinity was as universally taught as the sole orthodox doctrine. Be pleased then to point out that period, and prove that it existed, not by negatives, presumptions and arguments from improbability, but by clear, positive testimony². ”

VI. If the great body of the common people in the second and third centuries had been believers

¹ “ The appellation of heretics has always been applied to the less numerous party.” Gibbon, *Hist.* Vol. i. c. xv. p. 604. Ed. 4to.

Geddes, p. 32.

in the simple humanity of Christ, a peculiar spirit must have been infused into the writings of those ages, different from any thing which we now find in them. Simplicity, frankness, and enthusiastic zeal were the most striking features of the early Christian writers: a timid, time-serving disposition was, of all qualities, the most remote from their character. Had the common people, in their opinion, really laboured under an error on the important subject of Christ's nature, all their efforts would have been put forth to effect their conversion. Men, who intrepidly opposed the opinions of the whole heathen world, would certainly not have been afraid of attempting the complete conversion of their own people: all their labours would have been employed to convince them that they were guilty of blasphemy, in calling their Saviour a mere man; the homilies, the epistles, the histories and commentaries of the second and third centuries would have been filled with this subject; and we should see the opinions of the people every where combatted in the works of the learned. Since the writings of those times are not of this cast—since the learned, on the contrary, while delivering their sentiments respecting the Divinity of Christ, speak with confidence in the name of the great body of Christians, write apologies for them, and describe their tenets as their own—it seems necessary to conclude, that no material difference of opinion called for their exhortations.

The probability of this inference is increased by the consideration of a well known fact in the early

history of the Christian Church. In a few places, where the common people had been for a time converted to a sort of Unitarianism by some of their teachers, as at Carthage by Praxeas, and in Galatia by Marcellus¹, there we find the writers uttering complaints, and hear of extraordinary exertions to reclaim them from their errors. These complaints would not have been partial and local, if the common people had been Unitarians in other places.

VII. If ever there was a period when the utmost harmony subsisted between the rulers of the Church and the people under their care, it was in the first three centuries, before the Christian religion received the patronage and support of the civil government. This harmony was not destroyed in the time of Constantine. When the Arians first appeared, it may plainly be collected from the substance of a letter of Alexander, Bishop of Alexandria, preserved in Theodoret, that the opinions of the people on the very subject of Christ's nature were much influenced by those of their superiors. "He warns him," says Theodoret, "against permitting those workers of iniquity to come within any Churches under his jurisdiction, whatever pretended letters of communion any of them should bring; for, that they had not only with the Gentiles and Jews denied the Divinity of Christ, but had also done what his very crucifiers could not persuade themselves to do, &c.—that after they had been synodically ejected, they made their

¹ See History of Early Opinions, Vol. III. p. 340.

court to his brethren of the episcopal college, for commendatory and communicatory letters, which having, by their little knavish arts, dissimulations and calumnies, obtained from too many Bishops, they chimed that authority in the ears of the people, and made use of it to seduce others²." The Arians would not have chimed the authority of the Bishops in the ears of the people, if the former had maintained Christ to be coeternal and consubstantial with the Father, and the great body of the latter had believed him to be a mere man like themselves.

VIII. It is not unreasonable to collect the religious opinions of Christians in general, in the second and third centuries, from the nature of the religious services in which they joined. In the third century, it appears to have been disputed whether the hymns used in their Churches were written in the first age of Christianity, or not. But whether they were as ancient as they were commonly supposed, is a question which it is not necessary to decide, when we are only inquiring into the opinions of the common people about the time of Tertullian and Origen. To prove that the great body of Christians in the third century were believers in the Divinity of Christ, it is sufficient to observe, that hymns, either ancient, or novel, in which the Divinity of Christ was celebrated, were commonly used in the religious assemblies of Christians; and that one of the reasons for depriving Paul of Samosata of his bishopric was his attempt to

² Theodoret, Hist. L. i. c. iv. Parker's Translation.

abolish them¹. It is far from improbable that the hymns which Paul could not tolerate in his diocese, according to the received custom, were the very compositions, in which, according to the testimony of Pliny, the Christians, forty-seven years after the resurrection of Christ, *were accustomed* to address their praises to Christ as God².

IX. If the common people, the great body of Christians, in the third and fourth centuries, had believed in the simple humanity of Christ, as it has lately been asserted, we should have heard of Theodotus, Artemon, Paul of Samosata, Marcellus of Ancyra and Photinus insisting, that all the Christians *of their own time*, except a few Platonizing philosophers, were of their opinions. Instead of this, they declared that Unitarianism *had been* the universal religion; and thus, in referring to past time for the

¹ "Eusebius (Hist. L. v. c. xxviii.) gives a farther proof of this, informing us, that the many hymns composed upon our blessed Lord by the earliest Christians were arguments of his Divinity, and were so made use of against the heresy of Artemon, who denied it. The same historian likewise observes, (L. vii. c. xxx.) that another heretic, namely, Paulus Samosatenus, not bearing the evidence of those ancient hymns, which were composed upon our Lord, endeavoured to abolish them, under the pretence of their novelty; and for that, and his heretical opinions, was deprived of his bishopric.—The testimony of an enemy may in this case be as prevalent as that of a friend: for there seems no other reason why the aforesaid heretic should take so much pains to abolish the hymns relating to our Lord, if he had not thought the worship, which was paid by them, an argument of his Divinity." Defence of the Bishop of London's Letter (1719), p. 21.

Mosheim (p. 704.) has a curious conjecture, that Paul changed the Christian hymns for the Psalms of David, to please Zenobia.

² Quod essent soliti stato die, ante lucem convenire, carmenque Christo quasi Deo dicere secum invicem. Pliny, L. x. Ep. 97.

general prevalence of their opinions, virtually admitted all that we want to prove—the paucity of their followers, at the moment that their claim to antiquity was advanced.

Marcellus maintained, that Unitarianism *had been* universal, till Origen, one hundred years before him, introduced a different doctrine. The Unitarians of Origen's age, or a little before it, asserted the universality of their religion, till the purity of the Apostolical doctrine became corrupted under Zephyrinus: but no instance is found of any Unitarian affirming, or supposing, that the great body of Christians were of his opinion at the instant when he was defending his doctrine, and asserting its antiquity³. The difference between the conduct of the writers of the Church and that of Unitarians is in itself sufficient to determine which was the prevailing system in the second and third centuries. Justin, Athenagoras, Tatian, Irenæus, Tertullian, Origen and several others, declared that Christians in general *of their own time* believed in the Divinity of Christ⁴. The Unitarians affirmed their religion to have been generally prevalent at some preceding period.

³ The common chronology brings the accession of Victor as low as 192, and Zephyrinus 201. But there is great reason to question the accuracy of these dates. See Dissert. Præv. in Irenæum, p. 80. Ed. Ren. Massuet, Par. 1710. Where Victor is placed about 177. Without attempting to settle the chronology, it is sufficient to observe, that it was some time after the accession of Zephyrinus, when the Artemonites asserted the antiquity of their doctrine. This appears from the language of the writer quoted by Eusebius, Hist. L. v. c. xxviii.

⁴ See the last Chapter of this Volume.

X. As a medium for proving Unitarianism the universal religion of Christians in the age of the Apostles, it has been contended, that the great body of the common people in the second, third and fourth centuries, nay even in the fifth and sixth, were believers in the simple humanity of Christ; that their opinions on this subject were the same with those for which Paul of Samosata was excommunicated. "It cannot be doubted," says Dr Priestley, "but that the *simple* and *ignorant* people of Tertullian and Origen were the same with those that were complained of by Athanasius, as persons of *low understanding*; and these were the disciples of Paulus Samosatensis¹." Among other methods, the reasonableness of this strange hypothesis may be tried by the conduct of the first Christian emperor. "The sects, against whom the imperial severity was directed, appear to have been the adherents of Paul of Samosata, the Montanists of Phrygia—the Novatians—the Marcionites and Valentinians²." And can we believe it possible, that the emperor, immediately on embracing Christianity, should begin with the persecution of those tenets which formed the Christianity of his time? Are we seriously to learn from Dr Priestley, instead of gaining our information from Mr Gibbon, that Constantine was an oppressor, and not a protector of the great body of Christians? Policy, as some think, had a share in the emperor's conversion. What a singular kind of refinement must

¹ History of Early Opinions, Vol. III. p. 393.

² Gibbon, Hist. Vol. II. c. XXI. p. 232.

there have been in that policy, which induced him to desert his pagan subjects, and to show his attachment to his new religion by acts of severity against *the great mass* of its professors! Constantine, we may be well assured, would neither have shown any great solicitude to reconcile Trinitarians and Arians, and a tender care for their mutual interests, if these two parties had consisted only of a few philosophers: nor would he have persecuted believers in the simple humanity of Christ, if they had formed the great body of Christians. The Novatians agreed with the Church in their opinions respecting the nature of Christ, as well as in most of the leading doctrines of Christianity³: and, on a further inquiry into their opinions, “The Novatians were exempted by a particular edict from the general penalties of the law⁴.”

³ Mosheim, de Rebus ante Constant. p. 520.

⁴ Gibbon, Hist. Vol. II. p. 233.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE INTERPRETATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT, BY THE FIRST GENTILE CHRISTIANS, COLLECTED FROM THEIR RELIGIOUS OPINIONS.

1. General testimony of the heathens in the second and third centuries to the belief of Christians in the Divinity of Christ. Never denied by the learned or unlearned Christians. 2. Testimony of Adrian. 3. Testimony of the Heathens and Jews mentioned by Justin. 4. Testimony of Celsus and Lucian. 5. Testimony of the heathens in general mentioned by Minucius Felix. 6. Testimony of Porphyry. 7. Testimony of Hierocles and another heathen writer noticed by Lactantius. 8. Testimony of the heathens in general as described by Arnobius. 9. The general testimony of the heathens on this subject unopposed by any individual among themselves.—Effect which the objection of the heathens would have produced on the Apologies of the learned and unlearned Christians, if it had been without foundation.

I. THE Christians for many ages were a sect separated from the rest of the world by a new system of opinions, and by laws and customs of their own. The eyes of the surrounding heathens were soon turned upon them: and in less than a century after the foundation of their religion, they had become objects of curiosity, and, in some degree, of alarm. To ascertain the manners, opinions and practices of the first Christians, an industrious and careful inquirer will have recourse not only to their writings, but to those of heathen and Jewish observers, by whom they were surrounded. And it is a neglect, which hardly admits of excuse, that the evidence derivable from this last-mentioned source should have been almost entirely overlooked by the writer of “the History of

Early Opinions concerning Christ." Had the Carthaginian writings been fortunately preserved, we still should not despise the sketches of their history and manners, which are to be found in Greek and Roman writers. If the writings of some of the Jewish and Christian sectaries were now extant, such as the Essenes, the Menandrians, the Cerinthians, or Valentinians, we should yet think it our duty to attend to the descriptions of them in Philo, Josephus and Irenæus. Though some of the earliest writings of the Christian sect (considering the whole collective body of Christians under whatever denomination as one sect, with respect to the world at large,) have come down to us, we shall hardly be actuated by a proper regard for truth, if we determine to shut our eyes on the picture of them which is drawn by the heathens. We may suspect both the partiality of friends and the malice of enemies: it will be advisable to attend to the suggestions of both, and to collect the truth from a comparative view of their different representations. On many subjects, indeed, a complete account may be obtained of the Christians from their own writings: and we might also gain sufficient information, on several particulars respecting their character, from the writings of heathens alone.

When Celsus, for instance, in the middle of the second century, affirmed, that *all* the Christians were ignorant persons; we may be well assured, that very few of them could be acquainted with the writings of the Platonic philosophers; and thence infer with great probability, that Christianity could not then

have been generally corrupted from that source. When Julian complained, that the impious Galilæans not only supported their own poor, but many of those also among the heathens; philanthropy and charity, we should conclude, were in his time characteristic marks of Christianity. And when nearly all the heathen writers, who have mentioned the Christians before the Council of Nice, have represented them as worshippers of Christ; when we know from history, that the heathens in general considered the deification of Christ by Christians as a well known fact, which none of them ever questioned: “such evidence as this,” we should say, “cannot be controverted, the fact substantiated by it will never be disputed, this can be no calumny like some other groundless charges urged against Christians, which they denied and repelled:—it cannot have been a few learned men only among them, who entertained the notion of Christ’s Divinity, particularly at a time, when they were all accused of ignorance: it must certainly have been the great body of this people, whom these heathens had in view.”

On turning to the writings of the Christians before the Council of Nice, we find the case to be exactly as we should previously expect. A few idle, popular clamours raised against them, in which they were accused of incest, cannibalism and atheism, but which their more respectable enemies had not countenanced—these they denied and refuted. But, though the accusation of worshipping Christ as God was urged against them universally, by writers as

well as others, from Pliny to Julian, and was sometimes even made one of the grounds of persecution—not a single Christian can be mentioned, who ever denied the charge. On the contrary, their writers come forward to avow this part of their common faith, and to prove its reasonableness and truth.—To say that Tertullian and Origen described the great body of Christians as believers in the simple humanity of Christ, is an absurd fiction. Both of them have strenuously asserted the general belief of Christians in the Divinity of Christ.

• II. The testimony of Pliny, to this article of the Christian faith in the first century, has already been stated. The next heathen testimony is that of the emperor Adrian: who, in a letter to Serrianus, observes that “the Patriarch himself, when he comes to Egypt, is forced by some to worship Serapis, by others to *worship* Christ¹.”

The whole picture of Egypt is drawn by the imperial artist in caricature; and the features of Christians are distorted, together with the others in the whole group. But sober truth may sometimes be collected out of the exaggerations of wit and satire. At this time, when Christianity was perse-

¹ Ægyptum, quam mihi laudabas, Serriane dignissime, totam didici, levem, pendulam et ad omnia famæ momenta volitantem. Illi, qui Serapin colunt, Christiani sunt: et devoti sunt Serapi, qui se Christi episcopos dicunt. Nemo illic archisynagogus Judæorum, nemo Samarites, nemo Christianorum presbyter, non mathematicus, non aruspex, non aliptes. Ipse ille patriarcha, quum Ægyptum venerit, ab aliis Serapidem adorare, ab aliis cogitur Christum. Adrian. ap. Histor. August. Scriptores, Tom. II. p. 723. Lugd. Batav. 1671.

cuted by its enemies, some Christians, we might be previously assured, would so far dissemble, as to pay a constrained homage to the popular divinities of the country: we have the testimony of Adrian in this letter, confirmed by other evidence, that this actually happened in Egypt¹. The testimony, by which we gain this information, teaches us also, that the Patriarch was compelled by Christians to acknowledge in Christ the Divinity, which heathens forced him to own in Serapis.

The testimony of Adrian perfectly accords with that of Pliny. But from them we cannot learn the whole Christian theology. Whether Christ was worshipped as one among many gods: whether the Christians of that age, like the Sabellians some time later, and like the Swedenborgians in the present age, considered him as God the Father, or as one of the three persons in the Divine unity, or as an inferior Divinity: cannot be known from these testimonies only.

In our disputes with those moderns who suppose the Divinity of Christ to have been first acknowledged by Justin, it is of some importance to notice *the time* when Adrian visited Egypt, and made the observations which he committed to writing in this letter. Adrian had been informed of the worship of Christ by Christians A.D. 133, the very year in

¹ See Casaubon's learned note on this page: which, I think, obviates Lardner's ingenious conjecture (*Hist. of Heretics*, Book II. c. ii. § 21.) on the origin of Adrian's opinion, respecting the Christian worship of Serapis.

which Justin, in another part of the world, was converted to Christianity.

III. The next heathen and Jewish testimony on this subject is to be collected from the works of Justin himself. The professed purpose of his Apology, was to give an exact description of the conduct and religion of the Christians: who had been much calumniated. The objections against their religion, which he notices in his Apology, must have been started some years before it was written; and he had probably heard them even before his conversion. The doctrines, which had been the subject of popular animadversion, when he wrote, could not have been first introduced among Christians by him. Had the Divinity of Christ been first taught by a Platonist, who was converted to Christianity A. D. 133, this doctrine could not have been very common before the end of the second century; though we suppose great rapidity in its dissemination, and could hardly have been noticed by heathens before that time². If the worship of Christ was made a ground of objection against Christians before A. D. 140, this worship must have been some time established. Now, Justin himself, after having described the article of Christian faith relating to the Trinity, observes—"They (the Gentiles) declare us mad in this, saying that, after the immutable and eternal God, the parent of all,

² See Mr Bryant's last work, on "The Sentiments of Philo Judæus," pp. 60, 61, (1797) which has appeared since most of these sheets were printed.

we assign the second place to a crucified man; not knowing the mystery which this contains, to which we request you to turn your attention; while we explain it¹."

From this passage, compared with the context, it appears that, when Justin wrote his *first* Apology, Jesus Christ was honoured next to the Father; and that their extraordinary veneration for the founder of their religion was objected against the Christians as madness. He mentions it as a matter of common notoriety; he takes no step to prove the existence of the fact, but only attempts to show the reasonableness of the mystery, at which the heathens had expressed their surprise. From other parts of the same Apology it also appears, that Justin was answering remarks which had been made on the conduct and opinions of Christians before he wrote; and that one objection, which he endeavoured to remove by an illustration, which would appear familiar and reasonable to the worshippers of Jupiter and Mercury, was, that Christ was called the *Word* and the Son of God².

¹ Ἐνταῦθα γὰρ μανίαν ἡμῶν καταφαίνονται, δευτέραν χώραν μετὰ τὸν ἄτρεπτον καὶ αἰεὶ ὄντα θεόν, καὶ γεννήτορα τὸν ἀπάντων, ἀνθρώπων σταυρωθέντι διδόναι ἡμᾶς λέγοντες, ἀγνοοῦντες τὸ ἐν τούτῳ μυστήριον ᾧ προσέχουν ὑμᾶς, ἐξηγουμένων ἡμῶν, προτρεπούμεθα. Justin M. p. 20. Ed. Thirlby.

² Τῷ δὲ καὶ τὸν λόγον, ὃ ἐστὶ πρῶτον γέννημα τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἄνευ ἐπιμιξίας φάσκειν ἡμᾶς γεγενῆσθαι, Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν τὸν διδάσκαλον ἡμῶν, καὶ τοῦτον σταυρωθέντα, καὶ ἀποθανόντα, καὶ ἀναστάντα, ἀνεληλυθέναι εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν, οὐ παρὰ τοὺς παρ' ὑμῖν λεγομένους υἱοὺς τῷ Διὶ καινόν τι φέρομεν· πόσους γὰρ υἱοὺς φάσκουσι τοῦ Διὸς οἱ παρ' ὑμῖν τιμώμενοι συγγραφεῖς, ἐπίστασθε: Ερμῆν μὲν, &c. p. 31. Vid. etiam p. 33.

From the *Apologies* we are informed of the objections, which had been raised against Christianity by *the heathens*, before Justin wrote: and the *Dialogue* acquaints us with the accusations of *the Jews*. Justin, in this last work, after having alluded to several passages of the Old Testament, (Psalms xxii. xlvi. and xcvi.) expressing, as he supposed, the omnipotence, pre-existence and Divinity of Christ, is at last interrupted by Trypho (p. 213); who accuses him of impiety in declaring that it was Christ, who spoke with Moses and Aaron in the pillar of fire.—Justin replies, that the wisdom of God had been concealed from them, (the Jews,) that they had misunderstood their own Scriptures, and (p. 215) cites the forty-fourth Psalm, for the purpose of proving to Trypho the higher attributes of Christ. After all this, he adds, “It is not a matter of wonder, if you hate us, who understand *these things*, and who expose the eternal obduracy of your minds³.”

Here we see, the application of passages in the Old Testament to Christ by Christians, which the Jews thought to belong only to God the Father, is one of the causes assigned by Justin for the hatred of the Jews against his brethren⁴. From which we must conclude, that the Christians had endeavoured to prove the Divinity of Christ in this manner be-

³ Καὶ οὐδὲν θαυμαστὸν, εἰ καὶ ἡμᾶς μισεῖτε τοὺς ταῦτα νοοῦντας, καὶ ἐλέγχοντας ὑμῶν τὴν αἰὲς σκληροκάρδιον γνώμην. *Dialog.* p. 215.

⁴ For an account of Justin's manner of answering this objection of the Jews, which must have been made some time before he wrote, see Note, p. 42. of this Volume.

fore Justin's time; since he speaks of the hatred, which originated from this cause, as then existing.

In the beginning of the second century, whether the heathens spoke of the faith of Christians, like Pliny, as a matter of indifference, or as a subject of ridicule, like Adrian—whether it was mentioned by heathens as an instance of a sort of madness, or reprehended by Jews as impious and blasphemous—the doctrine of Christ's Divinity was every where brought forward as the leading article of their creed; and the opinion was ascribed to Christians in general, without distinction.

IV. Celsus, if we might trust to the authority of Origen, lived in the time of Adrian, and later. But, as it appears on other evidence that he was contemporary with Lucian, it is more probable that he was born in the reign of Adrian, than that he wrote in, or very near the time of that monarch. His treatise against Christianity might perhaps be composed about A. D. 160 or 170: and his observations on that subject which he committed to writing must have been made during the *preceding* part of his life. The opinions, which he ascribed to Christians, and which his antagonist allowed to be fairly stated, must have been common among the great body of that people as early, at least, as the year 140. This writer constantly represented them as believers in the Divinity of Christ. And it is clear, that he had not mistaken the opinions of a few philosophizing Christians, for those of the whole body; since he

accuses *all*, whom he had noticed, of ignorance, and represents them all as persons of low, and servile condition, and without common information¹. The language of the Christians, he says, is this: "Let no man of *education*, or wisdom, or prudence, come to us (for these things we reckon evils); but let any man without information, and understanding and common sense, come with confidence: for, in acknowledging these to be worthy of their God, they are evidently willing and able to prevail on the simple, the low-born, the stupid, and slaves, and silly women and children only²." The opinions, therefore, which Celsus ascribes to them, were not the opinions of a few Platonizing philosophers, but of plain, common, unlearned people, such as are described by Justin Martyr, Irenæus, Tertullian and Origen, under the title of *ιδιωται*. Let Celsus, then, be heard on the theology of the Christians.

Without citing all the passages preserved by Origen, in which the heathen philosopher mentioned the belief of Christians in the Divinity of Christ, it will be sufficient to refer to many of them³; and to observe, that the faith, which Celsus had observed,

¹ L. III. p. 120.

² Μηδεὶς προσίτω πεπαιδευμένος, μηδεὶς σοφός, μηδεὶς φρόνιμος (κακὰ γὰρ ταῦτα νομίζεται παρ' ἡμῖν) ἀλλ' εἴ τις ἀμαθής, εἴ τις ἀνόητος, εἴ τις νήπιος, θαρρῶν ἡκέτω. τούτους γὰρ ἄξιους σφετέρου Θεοῦ αὐτόθεν ὁμολογοῦντες, δῆλοί εἰσιν, ὅτι μόνους τοὺς ἡλιθίους καὶ ἀγενεῖς, καὶ ἀναισθήτους, καὶ ἀνδράποδα, καὶ γυναῖα, καὶ παιδείρια, πείθειν ἐθέλουσιν τε καὶ δύνανται. Celsus, ap. Origen. L. III. p. 137.

³ See pp. 22, 27, 30, 72, 74, 75, 78, 80, 81, 82, 85, 89, 101, 106, 107, 136, 162, 163, 385, 386.

in the middle of the second century or earlier, in the crowd of poor, ignorant Christians, as he describes them, is the faith of our Church, and of Christians in general of the present day. His principal objection, which he repeated to disgust, was urged against their belief in the union of the Divine and human natures in the person of Christ. "He objects against us," says Origen, "I know not how often, respecting Jesus, that we consider him as God with a mortal body¹." In many of the passages, to which I have referred, (i. e. all those in Origen's second book) Celsus speaks of those Christians, who had either been Jews, or whose ancestors had been of that nation²: in the others, he alludes to Christians at large.—He repeatedly speaks of Christ as the God of Christians; affirms that he is worshipped by them; alludes to the account of his miraculous conception³; observes that he is called the Word; says the place is shown, where Christ, "who is worshipped by Christians, was born⁴;" ridicules their inconsistency in laughing at the worshippers of Jupiter, whose tomb was shown in Crete, while they worship, as God, a

¹ Ἐπεὶ δ' ἐγκαλεῖ ἡμῖν, οὐκ οἶδ' ἤδη ὁποσάκις, περὶ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ, ὅτι ἐκ θνητοῦ σώματος ὄντα Θεὸν νομίζομεν. L. III. p. 135.

² Origen, through the whole of that book, considers them all (except the Ebionites, who continued mere Jews) as entertaining the same faith with the Christian Church at large; and answers the objections of Celsus, as alike applicable to the great body of Christians.

³ Page 27.

⁴ Καὶ τὸ δεικνύμενον τοῦτο διαβόητόν ἐστιν ἐν τοῖς τόποις καὶ παρὰ τοῖς τῆς πίστεως ἀλλοτρίοις, ὡς ἄρα ἐν τῷ σπηλαίῳ τούτῳ ὁ ὑπὸ Χριστιανῶν προσκυνούμενος καὶ θαυμαζόμενος γεγέννηται Ἰησοῦς. p. 39.

man who was buried in Palestine¹. He represents the Christians as censuring the Jews for not admitting the Divinity of Christ²; he every where speaks of their opinion relating to the Divinity of Christ as a matter of common notoriety, not as if its existence could possibly be denied, or as if he had been the first to expose it; and he attributes it to the great body of them, at the time that he represents them as common people, without education and philosophy. Yet it has lately been maintained, not only with perfect seriousness, but with uncommon zeal and pertinacity, that all Christians, whether learned or ignorant, were believers in the simple humanity of Christ, till about the age of Celsus; and that the great mass of them continued in the profession of the same faith many centuries later. And, 'what will excite some surprise, the philosophical author of this whimsical hypothesis has found *one* Vindicator, who has proclaimed the "*discovery*" with great solemnity to the youth of the two English Universities; and has recommended it to them as a medium for ascertaining, or confirming, the true sense of the New Testament.

By comparing Origen's defence with the attack of Celsus, it appears that the Jews, no less than the

¹ Μετὰ ταῦτα λέγει περὶ ἡμῶν, ὅτι καταγελωμέν τῶν προσκυνούντων τὸν Δία, ἐπεὶ τάφος αὐτοῦ ἐν Κρήτῃ δείκνυται καὶ οὐδὲν ἥττον σέβομεν τὸν ἀπὸ τοῦ τάφου, οὐκ εἰδότες πῶς καὶ καθὸ Κρηῆτες τοῦτο ποιῶσιν. p. 136.

² Φησὶ δὲ τοῦτο ἔγκλημα ἀπὸ τῶν εἰς τὸν Χριστὸν πιστευόντων προσάγεσθαι Ἰουδαίοις, ἐπεὶ μὴ πεπιστεύκασιν ὡς εἰς Θεὸν τὸν Ἰησοῦν. p. 61.

heathens, about the middle of the second century, censured the Christians in general for their belief in the Divinity of Christ. For Celsus has put many of his objections on this subject into the mouth of a Jew, and Origen found nothing to condemn, in this part of his *prosopopœia*. Lucian (A. D. 170) had observed the same worship of Christ by Christians, that had been noticed by his friend Celsus. He says, "They *still* worship that great man, who was crucified in Palestine¹." This language would not have been used to express a worship lately introduced.

V. The *worship* of Christ by Christians was observed by the heathens, and acknowledged by the Apologists, at the opening of the third century also. Minucius Felix (A. D. 220) says, "You wander far from the bounds of truth, who imagine, either that a criminal deserved to be considered as God by us, or that a mere earthly being could be thought so²."

VI. Porphyry, who wrote against the Christians at large, and not against a few philosophers only, (A. D. 270,) says, "Since Jesus began to be honoured, no man has experienced any public help from the Gods³:" and we know that this complaint had been

¹ Τὸν μέγαν γοῦν ἐκείνον ἔτι σέβουσιν ἄνθρωπον, τὸν ἐν τῇ Παλαιστίνῃ ἀνασκολοπισθέντα, ὅτι καινὴν ταύτην τελετὴν εἰσήγαγεν ἐς τὸν βίον. Lucian. de morte Peregrini, p. 996. ed. Bourd.

² Longe de viciniâ veritatis erratis, qui putatis Deum credi aut meruisse noxium, aut potuisse terrenum. Min. Felix, p. 33. Ed. Ouzel. Ludg. Bat. 1652.

³ Ἰησοῦ γὰρ τιμωμένον, οὐδεμιᾶς τις Θεῶν δημοσίας ὠφελείας ἤσθετο. Porphyr. ap. Euseb. Præp. Evang. L. v. c. i.

uttered long before his time. "Lucan, who wrote his *Pharsalia* scarce thirty years after our Lord's crucifixion, laments it, as one of the greatest misfortunes of that age, that the Delphian oracle was become silent:

— Non ullo sæcula dono
Nostra carent majore Deûm, quam Delphica sedes
Quod sileat. L. v. 111.

And Juvenal—

— Delphis oracula cessant,
Et genus humanum damnat caligo futuri.
SAT. VI. 544."⁴

"The orator Libanius praises Porphyry and Julian, for confuting the folly of a sect, which styled a dead man of Palestine God, and the Son of God⁵."

VII. Hierocles and another author, who wrote, not against a few philosophers, but against the religion and name of Christians (about A. D. 300, or earlier), are mentioned by Lactantius: and their objection against the Christian opinion, respecting the Divinity of Christ in particular, is recorded. "Tot semper latrones perierunt, et quotidie pereunt... Quis eorum post crucem suam, non dicam Deus, sed homo appellatus est⁶."

If Philostratus may be credited, the term Θεός, *God*, was applied by many to Apollonius of Tyana; and he accepted the title, observing that every good

⁴ Leland, *Adv. and Nec. of Rev.* Vol. i. p. 484. 4to.

⁵ Socrates, *Hist. Eccles.* iii. 23. Gibbon, Vol. i. c. xvi.

⁶ Lactantius, *L. v. c. iii.*

man is honoured with it¹. It appears, however, from the united testimonies of Adrian, Celsus, Porphyry and Hierocles, that the heathens considered Christians as really attributing Divinity to Christ in a strict and proper sense; and that the terms Θεός and Θεοῦ υἱός were not merely used as titles of honour. “In the time of our ancestors,” says Hierocles, “in the reign of Nero, flourished Apollonius of Tyana; who, after having, when very young, sacrificed at Ægæ in Cilicia to the benevolent God Æsculapius, wrought many and wonderful works.”—“To what purpose have I mentioned these things? that all may perceive the accuracy and solidity of our judgment in every thing, and the levity of the Christians: forasmuch as we do *not* esteem him, who did these things, a God, but a man favoured by the Gods: whereas they, for the sake of a few tricks, call Jesus God².” Hierocles must have known whether the great body of Christians, the common, unlearned Christians, ascribed Divinity to Christ, or not. And, if *they* had really thought him a mere man like themselves, the nature and

¹ Πάλιν ἤρετο, τοῦ χάριν οἱ ἄνθρωποι Θεόν σε ὀνομάζουσιν; ὅτι πᾶς, εἶπεν, ἄνθρωπος, ἀγαθὸς νομίζομενος, Θεοῦ ἐπωνυμία τιμᾶται. Apollon. vit. L. VIII. c. v. p. 325. citat. a Lardner, Vol. VIII. p. 258.

² Ἐπὶ τῶν προγόνων ἡμῶν κατὰ τὴν Νέρωνος βασιλείαν, Ἀπολλώνιος ἤκμασεν ὁ Τυανεύς, ὃς ἐκ παιδὸς κομιδῇ νέον, καὶ ἀφ’ οὐπὲρ ἐν Ἀιγαῖς τῆς Κιλικίας ἱεράσατο τῷ φιλανθρώπῳ Ἀσκληπιῷ, πολλὰ καὶ θαυμαστὰ διεπράξατο.—Τίνος οὖν ἕνεκα τούτων ἐμνήσθην; ἵνα ἐξῇ συγκρίνειν τὴν ἡμετέραν ἀκριβῆ καὶ βεβαίαν ἐφ’ ἐκάστῳ κρίσιν, καὶ τὴν τῶν Χριστιανῶν κουφότητα. εἴπερ ἡμεῖς μὲν τὸν τοιαῦτα πεποικότα, οὐ Θεόν, ἀλλὰ Θεοῖς κεχαρισμένον ἄνδρα ἡγούμεθα, οἱ δὲ δι’ ὀλίγας τερατείας τινὰς τὸν Ἰησοῦν Θεὸν ἀναγορεύουσι. Euseb. contra Hieroc. ad calcem Demon. Evang. p. 512. Ed. Paris. 1628.

language of this objection must have been very materially altered.

VIII. It is not necessary to cite parts of ancient history, to prove the hatred and persecution which the Christians in general, and not a few Platonic philosophers only among them, experienced from the heathens. To mention one cause of the hatred of their pagan enemies falls in with my present purpose.

Arnobius (A. D. 303) mentions that the heathens represented the Christians in general as odious to the Gods: and the worship offered to Christ as God is assigned as the reason. “The Gods are not incensed at you, because you worship the omnipotent God, but because *you maintain him to have been God*, who was born a mortal man, and (what is infamous even with the vilest persons) put to death by crucifixion; *and believe him to be still living, and worship him with daily prayers*³.” A heathen would not have addressed himself to the Christians in terms like these, if the great body of them had believed Christ to have been a mere man like themselves; and if a few philosophers only had asserted his Divinity. The heathens in the time of Arnobius, it appears, used nearly the same language on this subject, that Celsus had employed a century and a half before. “If these people” (the Christians) says Celsus, “worshipped no other

³ Non ideo Dii vobis infesti sunt, quod omnipotentem colatis Deum, sed quod hominem natum, et quod personis infame est vilibus, crucis supplicio interemptum, et Deum fuisse contenditis, et superesse adhuc creditis, et quotidianis supplicationibus adoratis. Arnobius, L. 1.

but one God, they might, perhaps, have some ground for attacking the others: but now they pay superstitious honours to this man, who lately appeared, and yet they imagine, that they do not offend God, if his servant also be worshipped¹.”

It is asserted by Dr Priestley, “that it was the meanness of Christ’s person, and the circumstances of his death, at which the heathen philosophers revolted².” But Cudworth, from these and similar passages, with far more reason observed—“Neither indeed was that the chief quarrel, which the Pagans had with the Christians, that they had deified one who was crucified—(though the cross of Christ was also a great offence to them)—but, that they, condemning the Pagans for worshipping others, besides the supreme, omnipotent God, and decrying all those Gods of theirs, did themselves notwithstanding worship one mortal man for a God³.”

IX. Upon the whole, it appears, that the opinion of the Christians in general, respecting the Divine nature of Christ, was a matter of common notoriety both among the Jews and Heathens in the first hundred years after the crucifixion of Christ; that it was mentioned, as a matter of indifference about

¹ Εἰ μὲν δὴ μηδένα ἄλλον ἐθεράπευον οὗτοι πλὴν ἓνα Θεόν, ἣν ἂν τις αὐτοῖς ἴσως πρὸς τοὺς ἄλλους ἀτενὴς λόγος· νυνὶ δὲ τὸν ἑναγχοσ φανέντα τοῦτον ὑπερβρησκεύουσι, καὶ ὁμῶς οὐδὲν πλημμελεῖν νομίζουσι περὶ τὸν Θεόν, εἰ καὶ ὑπηρέτης αὐτοῦ θεραπευθήσεται. Celsus apud Origen. L. viii. p. 385.

² History of Early Opinions, Vol. ii. p. 178.

³ Cudworth, Intellectual System, p. 278.

seventy-seven years after the foundation of Christianity, by Pliny; that it afforded Adrian matter for a satirical observation in a familiar letter to a friend, twenty-three years later; and had been the object of Jewish censure and heathen ridicule, before Justin wrote his first Apology and Dialogue. As Christians became more numerous, and more generally noticed, this opinion became the subject of more frequent animadversion: and Celsus, whose observations on Christians must have been made little more than a century after the foundation of our religion, represents its professors as common, unlearned people; and repeatedly speaks of their belief in the Divinity of Christ. His friend Lucian observes, that Christians *still* worship Christ. And it fully appears, that not only writers among the heathens, but the Roman world at large, during the second and third centuries, were thoroughly convinced that worship was offered to Christ as God by Christians, and declared that the Gods were incensed against them on *this* account. It must also be remarked, that, whenever the heathens alluded to this notion of Christians, they spoke of it, as of any other well-known fact, which had never been questioned or doubted. No heathen appears ever to have stepped forward to remove this vulgar error. No writer ever attempted to correct the erroneous notions of his contemporaries on this head; to inform them that philosophers only among Christians believed Christ to be God; while the great mass of the new sect thought him a mere man. In the second and third centuries, the Christian sect

became an object of general notice. Several philosophers appear to have read their books, and inquired into their opinions with considerable industry and care; almost every heathen must have had a relation, a friend, a domestic, or a neighbour, a Christian; and the opinions of the common people in particular of the new religion could not but have been well known to their contemporaries. When, therefore, we know that the heathens of those times, without any exception whatever on record, observed Divinity ascribed to Christ by Christians, the fact seems established beyond all dispute. On the authority of two or three writers of the Church, we believe that the Marcionites, who were separated from it, contended that Jesus was a man only in appearance. And on the authority of heathen writers of character, we are compelled to allow that the Christian sect, which was just separated from the heathen world, worshipped Christ as God.

But let it be supposed, that the heathens have misrepresented the sentiments of the great body of Christians on this subject. There were instances certainly, when they applied the whimsical notions of a few small sects to the whole body: and instances might perhaps be produced, in which some of the learned joined in the popular outcries against Christianity. The heathens, possibly, took for granted, that the opinions of the writers belonged also to the common people: and this, perhaps, was the source of their error. This supposition however, of a contrariety of opinion between the learned and unlearned, will not account for the mistake of the heathens before

the time of Justin, when the dissension is imagined to have first taken place. After his time let us freely suppose the learned Christians of one opinion respecting Christ, and the common people of another. Let us take it for granted, that the heathens gained their notions of the religious tenets of Christians from the learned only. Let it even be admitted that Celsus, who speaks of all Christians as ignorant persons, had conversed only with Platonic philosophers among them; that he, and Lucian, and Porphyry, and Hierocles, had discovered the notion of Christ's Divinity among these philosophers, and had concluded the same, of the common people, without further inquiry. — Had this really been the case, we should certainly have found the mistake of the heathens on this subject pointed out in the Apologies for Christianity. The Christian writers who successfully removed other unjust aspersions on their character, would be solicitous to have the governors of the Roman provinces rightly informed on this point; since one great cause of indignation against the whole Christian name was the reproach of polytheism urged against the heathens, while the Christians themselves worshipped Christ.

The conduct of every honest Apologist on this occasion would have been decided. "A new religion," they would have said to the heathens, "has appeared among you, which has excited much curiosity, incurred much hatred, and created some alarm. Your hatred and fears are alike groundless: and with respect to the opinions and conduct of these people, you all labour under a great mistake. The learned

and liberal among you, it is true, soon refused to countenance the absurd calumnies propagated, at first, against us: they have not accused us of atheism, incest and cannibalism. These were idle clamours never believed by many of you at any time, and they are now credited by none. Still, however, your notions about our religious opinions are very incorrect: and as one reason, why you think us just objects of persecution, is founded on error, our duty to God and our brethren, and a strict and conscientious regard for truth, call upon us to set you right in this particular. We have all spoken with freedom to you on the extravagancies of polytheism: and you are the more indignant at our expostulations, because, you say, our worship is not confined to one God: Jesus Christ, the founder of our religion, being, as you say, generally worshipped by us as God.—That the great body of our brethren may not be the victims of our dishonest concealment, it is necessary to be explicit with you on this subject.—The Christian Church, in this third century since the birth of Christ, independently of its sects, which we call heresies, is divided into two classes of men of directly opposite opinions. The men of learning and rulers of the Church, who are elected into their offices by the common people, universally believe in the Divinity of Christ, one only excepted, whom we are going to depose¹; and, if we are not mistaken, we could prove their notions to be perfectly consistent with that of the unity of God. But, however this may be, whe-

¹ Paul of Samosata.

ther their notions be agreeable to reason, or not, let the men of learning only suffer for their own opinions. You will, no doubt, be surprised, but it is strictly true, that the great body of Christians have always believed Christ to be a mere man like yourselves. We hold their opinions erroneous, and have been at great pains to convert them to our own: but their obstinacy is inflexible; they will neither learn, nor believe. We think them highly censurable for their dulness and pertinacity; but, in the name of heaven, do not blame or punish them for opinions, which no persuasion on our part can induce them to adopt. Turn your ridicule, your arguments, your force against us. Let our unhappy, ignorant brethren incur our reprehension only, which they deserve: they merit, on this account, no punishment and no censure from you.—We perceive you smile at this apology. You are determined not to believe, that our people really entertain an opinion essentially different from that of their teachers on a leading article of our common religion. You esteem this a mere fiction fabricated to screen our followers from a part of your vengeance. No asseverations of ours, we see, will persuade you, that they have uniformly elected into all offices of trust and power, and lately of profit too, men who have entertained opinions opposite to their own. We hear you express some surprise at a discovery, which you have made in our character. ‘These Christians’, you say, ‘with all their absurdity and folly and madness, have till now appeared to us men of great simplicity: we thought that we could

have believed them on their bare word: we have been strangely deceived, it appears: they want to abuse *our* simplicity most grossly. They think us weak enough to believe, that the rulers and their complying subjects, the electors and their representatives, the teachers and the people taught, between whom we have always observed far more than ordinary harmony, are of opposite opinions! No Christian, who has a proper regard for truth, can advance such a palpable falsehood: no writer, who has sufficient respect for the intellects of his readers, can, either now, or *at any future period*, hope to obtain a moment's credit to such an assertion.'—Your objection to our report is, we confess, not more than we expected. We cannot hope to obtain credit on this subject. The fact, of which we inform you, is certainly contrary to every principle of the human mind. It is, however, we think it our duty to repeat, a peculiarity of the Christian Church, which has existed ever since the time of Justin Martyr, and probably will long continue, that the writers and the governors of the Church, amounting only to a few hundreds at most¹, are believers in the Divinity of Christ,

¹ In the middle of the *third century*, Mr Gibbon determines the proportion between the Bishops and Presbyters and the rest of the people. "The clergy at that time" (in Rome) "consisted of a Bishop, *forty-six* Presbyters, *seven* Deacons, &c. The number of widows, of the infirm, and of the poor, who were maintained by the oblations of the faithful, amounted to fifteen hundred. (Euseb. L. VI. c. XLiii.) From reason, as well as from the analogy of Antioch, we may venture to estimate the Christians of Rome at about fifty thousand." Hist. Vol. i. p. 608. Ed. 4to. This perhaps is nearly the *proportion* between the higher clergy and the people through the whole Roman empire, in the middle of the third century.

while the great mass of Christians believe him to have been a mere man."

Such would have been one of the articles in the Apology of a learned Christian, had the common people asserted the simple humanity of Christ. In such a case he would neither have been disposed to conceal the truth, nor would he have dared to disguise it. "For, upon an inquiry made by the emperor, or his order, he would have been convicted of a design to impose upon all the majesty of the Roman empire, and that not in an affair incidentally mentioned, but in the conduct and worship of his own people, concerning whom he professed to give the justest information²."—We may conclude, therefore, with the utmost certainty, when the Apologists and others publicly declared the Christians at large believers in the Divinity of Christ, that the fact was strictly true.

But, let it be allowed, that all the learned Christians uttered a deliberate falsehood, when they reported the religious opinions of their brethren to the Roman emperors; that Justin, Athenagoras, Theophilus, Tertullian, Minucius Felix and Origen agreed in publicly asserting the same falsehood. What would have been the conduct of the unlearned Christians on such an occasion? What must have been their language on hearing a groundless accusation from the heathens aggravated in a tenfold degree by the false and treacherous defence of their Trinitarian brethren? Some very ignorant Christians, we know, were writers: on such an occasion, all who could write, would have

² Lardner, on *Justin*.

taken up their pens with grief and indignation, and have addressed themselves to the heathens in language, which those emotions naturally inspired.—“It has been our fate,” they would have said, “to have our conduct and opinions perpetually misrepresented. We were formerly traduced by the multitude, whom some of your own poets have (it seems justly) styled malignant, as monsters of wickedness: we are now described as singular examples of human folly. We have spoken out our sentiments to you with great freedom, on the absurdity of polytheism; and have both in private and public asserted the existence of one only God, the creator and preserver of all things, in whom we live, and move, and have our being. The boldness of our reproofs, you say, would be tolerable, were we not to contradict ourselves. At the very time, you allege, that we preach up the unity of God, we ourselves worship as God a man who was crucified at Jerusalem. This last charge, we assure you, is founded on a great mistake: but *your* ignorance of our opinions is excusable: what most excites our concern is the base and dishonest conduct of our own brethren, who call themselves philosophers; from whose writings you have too hastily taken up your opinions concerning us. They have had the audacity to represent the whole Christian body as of one mind, bound by the same laws, and entertaining the same opinions: they have had the unblushing effrontery to inform you, that we believe in the Divinity of Christ. We are urged by the most violent motives, the love of truth, the fear of

disgrace, a tender and lively concern for the honour of the Christian name, to come forward publicly, and deny the truth of this calumny. You have been grossly deceived. We believe Christ to have been a mere man like yourselves. A few philosophers only among us have introduced the notion of a Trinity of persons in the Divine Unity, from the writings of *Plato and his followers*: but the corruption has extended no further than themselves. Christ is not worshipped, as you have frequently objected against us, and as our brethren have frequently asserted, by the Christian world at large."

Had any Christian attempted to vindicate his brethren in this manner, in the second and third centuries, Celsus and Lucian and the author of the *Philopatris* would have smiled at the thought of the doctrines of Christ's Divinity and the Trinity in Unity having been copied from Plato¹; and Christians from that time would have been set down as persons totally unworthy of credit, who would deal in any ridiculous fiction, in order to forward their own purposes.

¹ "It was reserved for the disputers of later ages to assert, that those profound doctrines are in truth no part of genuine Christianity: that they were the subtile inventions of men: and that they were originally introduced into Christianity from the writings of Plato. As this assertion has been frequently repeated, though without the shadow of a proof, it deserved a minute inquiry," &c. Morgan, on the Trinity of Plato, p. 166. (1795).

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE INTERPRETATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT, BY THE FIRST GENTILE CHRISTIANS, COLLECTED FROM THEIR RELIGIOUS OPINIONS.

1. Testimony of Justin Martyr to the belief of Christians, particularly of the common people, in the Divinity of Christ. His obligation to relate the truth as described by Lardner.
2. Testimony of Athenagoras.
3. Tatian.
4. Theophilus.
5. Hegesippus and Irenæus.
6. Tertullian.
7. Testimony of Origen to the belief of Christians, particularly of the common people, in the Divinity of Christ. He complains of the common people offering up prayers to Christ, at the time that he recommends them to pray to God the Father only through Christ. His obligation to relate the truth as described by Dr Priestley.
8. Testimony of Novatian.
9. Arnobius and Lactantius.
10. General view of the evidence on this subject. Inference, respecting the opinions of Christians in the first century, from the opinions of the learned and unlearned Christians in the second and third. Their interpretation of the words of Christ and his Apostles collected from their religious opinions.

I. JUSTIN Martyr wrote his first Apology in the year 140, only seven years after he had relinquished the errors of paganism. His professed purpose in this treatise was to *remove the prejudices* entertained by the heathen world against Christians, by giving a full and exact description of their lives and doctrines. “It is our purpose,” he says, “to enable all to form a just judgment of our lives and doctrines¹.” And, accordingly, he speaks in the name of the Christians through the whole Apology, not in the name of himself and one or two philosophers

¹ Ἡμέτερον οὖν ἔργον καὶ βίου καὶ μαθημάτων τὴν ἐπίσκεψιν πᾶσι παρέχειν. p. 7. Ed. Thirlby.

only. Having mentioned the *worship* paid by Christians to God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit², and the charge of madness urged against them by the heathens, for placing Christ next to God the Father; he reasons on the fact of this worship as a matter of common notoriety, which it would have been absurd to deny; and immediately professes his intention to shew its reasonableness³. He afterwards describes at length the initiation of Christians into their religion by baptism in the name of the Father, of Jesus Christ the Son, and of the Holy Spirit⁴: and, what is of most importance to us at present, he positively asserts that *the common people* were accustomed to explain the Old Testament agreeably to the doctrine of the Trinity. He asserts that Plato had learnt from Moses to give the second place to the Λόγος (δευτέραν μὲν γὰρ χώραν τῷ παρὰ Θεοῦ λόγῳ—δίδωσι) and the third to the *spirit*, that was said to move on the waters (τὴν δὲ τρίτην τῷ λεχθέντι ἐπιφέρεσθαι τῷ ὕδατι πνεύματι), and he immediately declares that the same explications were understood and followed by the common, unlearned Christians of his

² Καὶ ὁμολογοῦμεν τῶν τοιούτων νομιζομένων Θεῶν ἄθεοι εἶναι, ἀλλ' οὐχὶ τοῦ ἀληθεστάτου—Θεοῦ· ἀλλ' ἐκεῖνόν τε, καὶ τὸν παρ' αὐτοῦ υἱὸν ἐλθόντα, καὶ διδάξαντα ἡμᾶς ταῦτα καὶ τὸν τῶν ἄλλων ἐπομένων καὶ ἐξομοιουμένων ἀγαθῶν ἀγγέλων στρατὸν, πνεῦμά τε τὸ προφητικὸν σέβομεθα καὶ προσκυνούμεν, κ. τ. έ. p. 11. See the Note in Thirlby, and Bryant's Dissertation on this passage.

³ Pages 19, 20.

⁴ Ἐπ' ὀνόματος γὰρ τοῦ πατρὸς τῶν ὅλων καὶ δεσπότης Θεοῦ, καὶ τοῦ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, καὶ πνεύματος ἁγίου, τὸ ἐν τῷ ὕδατι τότε λουτρὸν ποιοῦνται. p. 89.

time¹. Dr Priestley's summary method of setting aside this testimony will be seen in the subjoined note². Instead of following his elucidation, it will be proper, by comparing Justin with himself, to

¹ Apolog. i. p. 88.

² "It may be said, that the testimony of Tertullian is expressly contradicted by Justin Martyr, who (in giving an account of the circumstances in which the Platonic philosophy agreed, as he thought, with the doctrine of Moses, but with respect to which he supposed that Plato had borrowed from Moses) mentions the following particulars, viz. the power which was after the first God, or the Logos, 'assuming the figure of a cross in the universe, borrowed from the fixing up of a serpent (which represented Christ) in the form of a cross in the wilderness;' and a third principle, borrowed from the spirit, which Moses said moved on the face of the water at the creation; and also the notion of some *fire*, or conflagration, borrowed from some figurative expressions in Moses, relating to the anger of God waxing hot. 'These things,' he says, 'we do not borrow from others, but all others from us. With us you may hear and learn these things from those who do not know the form of the letters, and who are rude and barbarous of speech, but wise and understanding in mind, and from some who are even lame and blind, so that you may be convinced that these things are not said by human wisdom, but by the power of God.'"

Οὐ τὰ αὐτὰ οὖν ἡμεῖς ἄλλοις δοξάζομεν, ἀλλ' οἱ πάντες τὰ ἡμέτερα μιμούμενοι λέγουσι. παρ' ἡμῖν οὖν ἐστὶ ταῦτα ἀκοῦσαι καὶ μαθεῖν παρὰ τῶν οὐδὲ τοὺς χαρακτῆρας τῶν στοιχείων ἐπισταμένων, ἰδιωτῶν μὲν καὶ βαρβάρων τὸ φθέγμα, σοφῶν δὲ καὶ πιστῶν τὸν νοῦν ὄντων, καὶ πηρῶν καὶ χήρων τινῶν τὰς ὀψεις ὡς συνεῖναι, οὐ σοφία ἀνθρωπεία ταῦτα γεγονέναι, ἀλλὰ δυνάμει Θεοῦ λέγεσθαι. Apol. p. 88.

"But all that we can infer from this passage is, that these common people had learned from Moses that the world was made by the power and wisdom (or the Logos) of God; that the serpent in the wilderness represented Christ; and that there was a spirit of God that moved on the face of the waters: in short, that these plain people had been at the source from which Plato had borrowed his philosophy. It is by no means an explicit declaration that these common people thought that the Logos and the Spirit were persons distinct from God. Justin was not writing with a view to that question, as Tertullian was, but only meant to say how much more knowledge was to be found among the lowest of the Christians, than among the wisest of the heathen philosophers." History of Early Opinions, Vol. III. p. 248.

determine whether he has really borne testimony in this place to the Trinitarianism of the unlearned Christians, or not: whether Christ was, or was not, the Λόγος to which they assigned δευτέραν χώραν.

Τὸν διδάσκαλόν τε τούτων γενόμενον ἡμῖν, καὶ εἰς τοῦτο γεννηθέντα ἸΗΣΟΥΝ, — Υἱὸν ἈΥΤΟΥ ΤΟΥ ὄΝΤΩΣ ΘΕΟΥ μαθόντες, καὶ ἘΝ ΔΕΥΤΕΡΑΙ ΧΩΡΑΙ ἔχοντες, πνευμά τε προφητικὸν ἐν τρίτῃ τάξει ὅτι μετὰ λόγου τιμῶμεν, ἀποδείξομεν³.

The testimony of Justin to the belief of Christians in general, and the common people in particular, in the Divinity of Christ, is full and clear. He had engaged to give a true account of the opinions and manners of the Christians at large: and it was not consistent with his character and practice to put off his own particular opinions for those of the whole body of his brethren, even on occasions when he lay under less powerful obligations to adhere to truth, than at the time when he wrote his Apologies. In the Dialogue (p. 311), Trypho asks, whether Jerusalem would be rebuilt, and whether Christians, with Christ at their head, and all virtuous Jews, who had lived before his appearance, would assemble, and possess it.—Justin, with many others of his age, was a Millennarian: but, instead of declaring that this was the opinion of Christians in general, he returns this answer: “I have acknowledged before, that I and many others are of this opinion; but I have also intimated, that many true and pious Christians do not admit this.” Would a person, who was so

³ Pages 19, 20.

little disposed to pass his own opinions for those of the whole body of Christians, have ventured to declare to the Roman emperor, that Christians in general believed in the Divinity of Christ, if he himself had been the first to introduce that doctrine, and if it had been embraced only by a few individuals? Justin's knowledge of his subject precludes all possibility of a mistake; his character will not admit the supposition of a wilful falsehood, and he would not have dared, had he been inclined, to deceive those, to whom his Apologies were addressed. He must have been well assured of the truth of what he says, and 'tis likely he knew it to be the ordinary opinion of the Christian people he had visited in his travels. If it had not been a general opinion, or had obtained in some few places only, he must have spoken more cautiously, and made use of some limitations and exceptions. For, if there were Christian people in any considerable numbers, who believed not in the Divinity of Christ, upon inquiry made by the emperor or his order, he had run the hazard of being convicted of a design to impose upon all the majesty of the Roman empire; and that not in an affair incidentally mentioned, but in the conduct and worship of his own people, concerning whom he professed to give the justest information.

I have described Justin's obligation to relate the truth on this subject almost entirely in the language which Lardner has applied to the same purpose on another¹. And it will be almost equally applicable to the other Apologists.

¹ See Lardner, on *Justin*.

II. Athenagoras wrote his Apology (perhaps about A. D. 170), after the worship of Christ had been a subject of ridicule among the heathens; as appears from the treatise itself. In answer to the charge of atheism, after having explained the Christian notions on the existence of a God, Athenagoras adds (speaking in the name of the Christian community, and not of a limited part of it), "We also acknowledge the Son of God. Nor let any one think that there is any thing ridiculous in my attributing a Son to God. For, *our sentiments*, whether of God the Father, or of the Son, are not like the fables of the poets, who make their gods no better than men. But the Son of God is the Word of the Father in comprehension and operation: for through him and by him were all things made; the Father and the Son being one²," &c. After this he adds: "Who then would not be perplexed at hearing people called atheists, who declare the Father God, the Son God, and the Holy Spirit³," &c. And he immediately subjoins: "You must not wonder, if I go through the

² Νοοῦμεν γὰρ καὶ υἱὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ. καὶ μὴ μοι γελοῖόν τις νομίσῃ τὸ υἱὸν εἶναι τῷ θεῷ. οὐ γὰρ ὡς ποιηταὶ μυθοποιοῦσιν, οὐδὲν βελτίους τῶν ἀνθρώπων δεικνύντες τοὺς Θεοὺς, ἢ περὶ τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ πατρὸς ἢ περὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ πεφρονήκαμεν. ἀλλ' ἔστιν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ λόγος τοῦ πατρὸς, ἐν ἰδέᾳ καὶ ἐνεργείᾳ. πρὸς αὐτοῦ γὰρ, καὶ δι' αὐτοῦ πάντα ἐγένετο, ἐνὸς ὄντος τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ· ὄντος δὲ τοῦ υἱοῦ ἐν πατρὶ, καὶ πατρὸς ἐν υἱῷ ἐνότητι καὶ δυνάμει πνεύματος, νους καὶ λόγος τοῦ πατρὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ. Athenagoras, p. 10. ad. calcem Justini Mart. Ed. Paris. 1615.

³ Τίς οὖν οὐκ ἂν ἀπορήσαι, λέγοντας θεὸν πατέρα καὶ υἱὸν θεὸν καὶ πνεῦμα ἅγιον, δεικνύντας αὐτῶν καὶ τὴν ἐν τῇ ἐνώσει δυνάμιν, καὶ τὴν ἐν τῇ τάξει διαίρεσιν, ἀκούσας ἀθέους καλουμένους; p. 11.

account concerning *us* with accuracy: I speak accurately, that you may not be carried away with the vulgar and senseless opinion, but may be able to learn the truth¹."

Athenagoras then, when professing to speak with accuracy on the conduct and opinions of Christians, has represented them in general as believing in the Divinity of Christ. Either he was guilty of a wilful falsehood, or they were not Unitarians. Under this article, it may be observed of the Apologists in general: 1. When Christians were stigmatized as *atheists*, they appealed to their religious tenets, publicly avowing the belief of their brethren in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. 2. When their enemies, taking another ground, taxed them with worshipping a crucified man, they admitted the fact of the worship; but denied that he was a mere man. 3. They made these declarations, when under very strong obligations to relate the truth, and sometimes when they professed to speak with the utmost care and accuracy.

III. Tatian, (about A. D. 170) after having noticed the corruptions in the Greek philosophy, proceeds to describe the tenets of Christians as distinguished from those of the heathens. "I will give you," he says, "a more clear exposition of our sentiments²."

¹ Εἰ δὲ ἀκριβῶς διέξειμι τὸν καθ' ἡμᾶς λόγον, μὴ θαυμάσητε. ἵνα γὰρ μὴ τῇ κοινῇ καὶ ἀλόγῳ συναποφέρησθε γνώμῃ, ἔχητε δὲ τὰ ληθὲς εἰδέναι, ἀκριβολογοῦμαι. p. 11.

² Φανερώτερον δὲ ἐκθήσομαι τὰ ἡμέτερα. Tatian, p. 145. Ed. Paris.

And soon after, adds that the Word created angels before men³. Alluding to the popular cry raised against the Christians for worshipping, as God, a man who was born and crucified in Palestine, he says, "We are not senseless, O Greeks, nor talk trifles to you, when we declare that God was born in the form of man⁴."—Tatian then, professing to give a clear exposition of the sentiments of Christians in general, and not of that extremely limited part, which consisted of a few philosophers, declares their belief in the pre-existence and Divinity of Christ; and from the language, which he employs, it appears that these tenets had been ridiculed by the heathens *before* he wrote.

IV. Theophilus, (about A. D. 170) after having mentioned the Churches, which existed in the world, and heresies separated from them, observes that the luminaries of heaven were created on the fourth day; that the fourth day is a type of man, who wants light; and that the three days, which preceded the creation of the Sun and Moon, are a type of the mystery of the Trinity⁵. He afterwards gives an account of the Logos from St John's Gospel, which he cites. Though his testimony to the faith of the Christians in general of his time is not so express as

³ Ὁ μὲν οὖν λόγος πρὸ τῆς τῶν ἀνδρῶν κατασκευῆς ἀγγέλων δημιουργός. p. 146.

⁴ Οὐ γὰρ μωραίνομεν, ἄνδρες Ἕλληνες, οὐδὲ λήρους ἀπαγγέλλομεν, θεὸν ἐν ἀνθρώπου μορφῇ γεγονέναι καταγγέλλοντες. p. 159.

⁵ Page 94.

that of some of the other Apologists, he has indirectly declared the Churches Trinitarian.

V. Hegesippus and Irenæus (A. D. 170) were not Apologists; but they were under the common obligations to relate the truth; and both of them have borne full testimony to, what they thought, the orthodoxy of Christians in general of their own time. While Hegesippus was thought an Unitarian, his evidence was brought forward with great confidence¹; and we must not allow it to be drawn back, after he has been proved to have been a believer in the Divinity of Christ². This historian, after noticing that the members of the Corinthian Church, with whom he conversed in his way to Rome, “*continued orthodox*” till the time of Primus, and after mentioning that Anicetus, whom he had visited, had been succeeded as Bishop of Rome by Soter, who was followed by Eleutherus, observes that, “under each successive Bishop, and in every city, the opinions prevail, which the Law teaches and the Prophets and the Lord³.”

¹ History of Early Opinions, Vol. iv. p. 308. See also the opening of the History of Corruptions.

² See Chap. ix. of this Volume.

³ Καὶ ἐπέμενεν ἡ ἐκκλησία ἡ Κορινθίων ἐν τῷ ὀρθῷ λόγῳ, μέχρι Πρίμου ἐπίσκοπεύοντος ἐν Κορίνθῳ· οἷς συνέμιξα πλέων εἰς Ῥώμην, καὶ συνδιέτριψα τοῖς Κορινθίοις ἡμέρας ἱκανάς· ἐν αἷς συνανεπάμην τῷ ὀρθῷ λόγῳ. Γενόμενος δὲ ἐν Ῥώμῃ, διαδοχὴν ἐποίησάμην μέχρις Ἀνικλήτου—καὶ παρὰ Ἀνικλήτου διαδέχεται Σωτήρ, μεθ’ οὗ Ἐλεύτερος. ἐν ἐκάστη δὲ διαδοχῇ καὶ ἐν ἐκάστη πόλει οὕτως ἔχει, ὡς ὁ νόμος κηρύττει καὶ οἱ προφῆται καὶ ὁ Κύριος. Euseb. Hist. L. iv. c. xxii.

“The Church,” says Irenæus, “though spread through the whole world to the very bounds of the earth, having received from the Apostles and their disciples, the faith in one God the Almighty Father, who made the heaven, and the earth, and the seas, and all that are in them, and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God invested with flesh for our salvation, and in the Holy Spirit⁴,” &c. “The Church having received this doctrine and this faith above-mentioned, though spread through the whole world, carefully preserves them, as if it were confined to one house, and believes these articles in the same sense, as if it had the same soul and the same heart; and preaches and teaches and communicates them with perfect harmony, as if it possessed one and the same mouth. Languages vary through the world, but the power of tradition is one and the same. And neither do the Churches founded in Germany believe or transmit doctrines different from others, nor those in Spain, nor those among the Celts, nor in the East, in Egypt, in Libya and the middle of the world. But as there is one and the same sun created by God for the whole world; so the preaching of truth shines every where, and sheds light upon all who wish to arrive at the knowledge of it: and neither will any ruler in the Churches, who is powerful in eloquence, deliver doctrines different from these, nor will one, who is feeble in speech, take away from the doctrine delivered to him; for as there is one and the same faith, neither he, who is able to describe it in many

⁴ See p. 253 of this Volume.

words, says too much; nor he, who has few, too little¹."

We may suspect the accuracy of this pompous and hyperbolical representation. But if any considerable body of people among Christians had been Unitarians, Irenæus, a believer in the Divinity of Christ, would not have described the general faith with such complacency and exultation.

VI. The testimony of Tertullian to the belief of Christians in general has been already noticed². "He also gives a plain proof that some of the public offices at that time were sent up to God and Christ together; for, showing the inconsistency of the Roman shows with a Christian's duty, 'What is it,' says he, 'to go out of the Church of God into the

¹ Τοῦτο τὸ κήρυγμα παρειληφύια, καὶ ταύτην τὴν πίστιν, ὡς προέφαμεν, ἡ Ἐκκλησία, καίπερ ἐν ὅλῳ τῷ κόσμῳ διεσπαρμένη, ἐπιμελῶς φυλάσσει, ὡς ἓνα οἶκον οἰκοῦσα· καὶ ὁμοίως πιστεύει τούτοις, ὡς μίαν ψυχὴν καὶ τὴν αὐτὴν ἔχουσα καρδίαν, καὶ συμφώνως ταῦτα κηρύσσει, καὶ διδάσκει, καὶ παραδίδωσιν, ὡς ἐν στόμα κεκτημένη· καὶ γὰρ αἱ κατὰ τὸν κόσμον διάλεκτοι ἀνόμοιαι, ἀλλ' ἡ δύναμις τῆς παραδόσεως μία καὶ ἡ αὐτή. καὶ οὔτε αἱ ἐν Γερμανίαις ἰδρυμέναι Ἐκκλησίαι ἄλλως πεπιστεύκασιν ἢ ἄλλως παραδιδόασιν, οὔτε ἐν ταῖς Ἰβήρῃαις, οὔτε ἐν Κελτοῖς, οὔτε κατὰ τὰς ἀνατολὰς, οὔτε ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ, οὔτε ἐν Λιβύῃ, οὔτε αἱ κατὰ μέσα τοῦ κόσμου ἰδρυμέναι· ἀλλ' ὥσπερ ὁ ἥλιος, τὸ κτίσμα τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἐν ὅλῳ τῷ κόσμῳ εἰς καὶ ὁ αὐτός, οὕτω καὶ τὸ κήρυγμα τῆς ἀληθείας πανταχῇ φαίνει, καὶ φωτίζει πάντας ἀνθρώπους τοὺς βουλομένους εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν ἀληθείας ἔλθειν. καὶ οὔτε ὁ πᾶν δυνατὸς ἐν λόγῳ τῶν ἐν ταῖς Ἐκκλησίαις προεστῶτων, ἕτερα τούτων ἐρεῖ — οὔτε ὁ ἀσθενὴς ἐν τῷ λόγῳ ἐλαττώσει τὴν παράδοσιν. μίας γὰρ καὶ τῆς αὐτῆς πίστεως οὔσης, οὔτε ὁ πολὺν περὶ αὐτῆς δυνάμενος εἰπεῖν ἐπλεόνασεν, οὔτε ὁ τὸ ὀλίγον, ἡλαττόνησε. Iren. L. i. c. iii.

² Page 329.

assembly of the devil; out of heaven to earth, to weary those hands, which you have lifted up to God, by clapping and praising a player afterwards—to say *from ages to ages* to any other but God *and Christ*³. Some have from hence conjectured, that here is an allusion to the doxology” (now used by the Church of England); “but let that be as it will, it is a plain proof that the joint invocation of the Father and Son was used in some particular hymn of that time; the expression *from ages to ages* being in all probability a part of some antiphon or response of the people to the minister⁴.”

VII. The testimony of Origen to the belief of Christians in general in the Divinity of Christ, and more particularly of the common people of his age, is also very clear and decisive. And he and Justin Martyr, it may be remarked, when speaking of this faith of unlearned Christians, have described them by the very term “*Idiotæ*,” which Tertullian has applied to the common people of Carthage, in the passage which has lately been cited, by mistake, in support of the Socinian hypothesis. “Of whose” (i. e. Christ’s) “*Divinity*,” says Origen, “so many churches of men converted from wickedness are witnesses⁵.” And,

³ Quale est enim de Ecclesiâ in Diaboli Ecclesiam tendere, de cœlo (quod aiunt) in cœnum, illas manus, quas ad Deum extuleris, postmodum laudando histrionem fatigare,—εἰς αἰώνας ἀπ’ αἰῶνος, alii omnino dicere nisi Deo et Christo? De Spectaculis, c. xxv.

⁴ Defence of the Bishop of London’s Letter, p. 17. (1719).

⁵ Οὐ τῆς θεϊότητος μάρτυρες αἱ τοσαῦται τῶν μεταβαλόντων ἀπὸ τῆς χύσεως τῶν κακῶν ἐκκλησίαι. Orig. cont. Celsum, L. i. p. 36.

speaking of Christians in general, he observes: "We affirm that God spoke to him (Christ) when he said; *Let there be light*¹;" and "Let those accusers know, that he, whom we consider as God and Son of God, and have been so persuaded, from the beginning, is the very Word, the Wisdom, and the Truth²."—"We serve then, as we have given out, one God the Father and the Son, and we hold firmly against the other (i. e. the heathen Gods): nor do we render undue and superstitious honours to a being who but lately came into the world, as if he had not pre-existed: for we believe him, when he says, 'Before Abraham was, I am,' and when he says, 'I am the Truth;' and there is *no one of us* so servile as to think that truth had no existence before the time of Christ's manifestation. We worship then the Father of truth and the Son, who is truth itself, two' τῇ ὑποστάσει, but one in harmony, concord and identity of will³."—Arians and Trinitarians have severally claimed Origen as their own. Huetius is of opinion, that in this

¹ Τούτῳ γάρ φαμεν ἐν τῇ κατὰ Μωσέα κοσμοποιῖᾳ προστάττοντα τὸν πατέρα εἰρηκέναι τὸ Γενηθήτω φῶς. L. II. p. 63.

² Ἰστωσαν οἱ ἐγκαλοῦντες, ὅτι ὃν μὲν νομίζομεν καὶ πεπεῖσμεθα ἀρχῆθην εἶναι Θεὸν καὶ υἱὸν Θεοῦ, οὗτος ὁ αὐτολόγος ἐστὶ, καὶ ἡ αὐτοσοφία καὶ αὐτοαλήθεια. L. III. p. 135.

³ Ἐνα οὖν Θεὸν, ὡς ἀποδεδώκαμεν, τὸν πατέρα καὶ τὸν υἱὸν θεραπεύομεν· καὶ μένει ἡμῖν ὁ πρὸς τοὺς ἄλλους ἀτενὴς λόγος· καὶ οὐ τὸν ἑναγχὸς γε φανέντα, ὡς πρότερον οὐκ ὄντα, ὑπερβηρσκεύομεν, αὐτῷ γὰρ πειθόμεθα τῷ εἰπόντι, Πρὶν Ἀβραὰμ γενέσθαι ἐγὼ εἰμι· καὶ λέγοντι, Ἐγὼ εἰμι ἡ ἀλήθεια· καὶ οὐχ οὕτω τις ἡμῶν ἐστὶν ἀνδράποδον, ὡς αἶσθαι ὅτι ἡ τῆς ἀληθείας οὐσία πρὸ τῶν χρόνων τῆς τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐπιφανείας οὐκ ἦν. θρησκεύομεν οὖν τὸν πατέρα τῆς ἀληθείας, καὶ τὸν υἱὸν τὴν ἀλήθειαν, ὄντα δύο τῇ ὑποστάσει πράγματα, ἐν δὲ τῇ ὁμοιοῖᾳ καὶ τῇ συμφωνίᾳ καὶ τῇ ταυτότητι τοῦ βουλήματος. L. VIII. p. 386.

passage he has distinguished between the *substance* of the Father and the Son, agreeably to the Arian hypothesis: others contend that by distinct *ὑποστάσεις* he only meant a distinction of persons. He has indeed strongly insisted on the Divinity of Christ, and has represented Christians in general as believing in the same doctrine: but his own opinions on this subject were not exactly those of his brethren about his own time. Though he has left full testimony to the belief of his fellow Christians in the Divinity of Christ, it appears, by his own acknowledgment, that the common unlearned people about him—the idiotæ, as he and Justin and Tertullian call them—could not be prevailed on to adopt his peculiar notion and practice of praying to the Father only, through the Son.

He addresses himself to them with evident vexation: “If we would hear,” says he, “what prayer is, we should not pray to any generated being, not even to Christ himself; but to the God and Father of all alone, to whom our Saviour himself prayed’.”—“It is not reasonable for those, who are thought worthy to be sons of the same Father, to pray to a brother: for, ‘You must send up your prayers to the Father alone, with me and through me.’ Hearing then Jesus say this, let us pray to God through him, all speaking the same words, and not divided about the form of prayer: and *are we not* divided, if some pray to

⁴ Ἐὰν δὲ ἀκούωμεν ὃ τί ποτέ ἐστι προσευχή, μήποτε οὐδενὶ τῶν γεννητῶν προσευκτέον ἐστίν, οὐδὲ αὐτῷ τῷ Χριστῷ· ἀλλὰ μόνῳ τῷ θεῷ τῶν ὄλων καὶ πατρὶ, ᾧ καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ σωτὴρ ἡμῶν προσηύχετο. De Oratione, c. XLIV. p. 78. ed. Reading, citat. a Priestley, History of Early Opinions, Vol. II. p. 161.

the Father, and some to the Son? *common people*, in great simplicity from a want of an examination and investigation of the subject, *committing an offence in offering prayers to the Son, either with the Father, or without the Father*¹.”

Origen, we see, wished to introduce uniformity in the service of the Church: he himself offered up prayers to God the Father alone, through Christ: the common, unlearned people, the idiotæ, had not conformed to his practice; but prayed either to God the Father and Christ, or to Christ alone. It will be interesting to see how Dr Priestley disposes of this testimony. In his Letter to Dr Knowles, he produces only a part of the passage, and drops the last clause: and in his History of Early Opinions, as well as in that Letter, by means of a false translation, he has forced Origen to declare, that in praying to the Father through Christ, and in not praying to Christ, Christians *are all agreed*².

¹ Ἀδελφῶ δὲ προσεύχεσθαι τοὺς κατηξιωμένους ἐνὸς αὐτοῦ πατρὸς οὐκ ἔστιν εὐλογον· μόνῃ γὰρ τῷ πατρὶ μετ' ἐμοῦ καὶ δι' ἐμοῦ ἀναπεμπτέον ἐστὶν ὑμῖν προσευχήν. ταῦτ' οὖν λέγοντος ἀκούοντες Ἰησοῦ, τῷ θεῷ δι' αὐτοῦ εὐχόμεθα, τὸ αὐτὸ λέγοντες πάντες, μηδὲ περὶ τοῦ τρόπου τῆς εὐχῆς σχιζόμενοι· ἢ οὐχὶ σχιζόμεθα, εἰὰν οἱ μὲν τῷ πατρὶ, οἱ δὲ τῷ υἱῷ εὐχόμεθα; ἰδιωτῶν ἀμαρτίαν κατὰ πολλὴν ἀκεραιότητα, διὰ τὸ ἀβασάνιστον καὶ ἀνέξεταστον, ἀμαρτανόντων τῶν προσευχομένων τῷ υἱῷ, εἴτε μετὰ τοῦ πατρὸς, εἴτε χωρὶς τοῦ πατρὸς. De Orat. c. xlv. p. 84. citat. a Priestley.

² “We are not to pray to a brother, who has the same common Father with ourselves; Jesus himself saying, that we must pray to the Father through him. In this *we are all agreed, and are not divided* about the method of prayer: but should we not be divided, if some prayed to the Father and some to the Son? Common people, (he says) through a great mistake, and for want of distinguishing, *prayed to the Son either with the Father, or without the Father.*” Origen. Priestley's Translation.

When

Even the silence of Origen on this subject is almost as conclusive as his positive testimony. In a multitude of passages, which he has cited from Celsus, it is declared, that Christ was worshipped, as God and the Son of God, by Christians; and this, when all of them are stated to be ignorant people, of low condition. Instead of denying this representation, he has sometimes expressly, and sometimes silently, admitted it to be just.

But in one part, it may be observed, Celsus speaks of *some* Christians only, who were in the profession of this faith. “That *some* Christians should maintain, that any God, or Son of God, has come down to justify people on earth, and that Jews should hold that he *will* come, is most scandalous: and but few words are requisite for the refutation of this notion³.”—This unusual mark of limitation, *τινες, some*, may create a suspicion, that Christians of this class were not very numerous. Origen, when Celsus speaks of Christians in general believing in the Divinity of Christ, acquiesces in his representation, and defends the faith of his brethren. Let us see whether his scrupulous and fastidious accuracy will allow the propriety of this expression, “*some of the Christians.*”

When Dr Priestley, in other parts of his work, appeals to the testimony of Origen, to prove that the Christians of his age were *not* accustomed to pray to Christ, he alludes to this passage: the beginning of which, according to his translation, holds one language, and the end another.

³ “Ὅτι δὲ καὶ Χριστιανῶν *τινες* καὶ Ἰουδαῖοι οἱ μὲν καταβεβηκέναι, οἱ δὲ καταβήσεσθαι εἰς τὴν γῆν τινα Θεὸν, ἢ Θεοῦ υἱὸν, τῶν τῇδε δικαιοτήτων, (λείπει ἴσ. λέγουσι Spencer.) τοῦτ’ αἴσχιστον, καὶ οὐδὲ δεῖται μακροῦ λόγου ὁ ἔλεγχος. Celsus. ap. Orig. Lib. iv. p. 161.

His answer is this: "He" (Celsus) "appears to be inaccurate in asserting of the whole body of Jews, and not of *some individuals of them*, 'that they expect a being *will come down* to earth,' and of Christians, in declaring 'that *some* of them maintain that he has come down¹."

Celsus, it is intimated by Origen, ought to have spoken of *all* Christians, and only of some individuals among the Jews. Three historical facts of great importance are established by this testimony. 1. *All*, whom Origen called Christians, i. e. every individual *of the Church*², believed that Christ was a divine being who had descended from heaven. 2. The great body of Jews expected a mere man for their Messiah. 3. Some individuals of that people expected the Son of God, a being more than man³.

Novatian says, "Si homo tantummodo Christus; quomodo *adest ubique invocatus*, cum hæc hominis natura non sit, sed *Dei*, ut adesse omni loco possit⁴?"

¹ Καὶ οὐ δοκεῖ γε ἀκριβῶς περὶ μὲν Ἰουδαίων οὐ τινῶν, ἀλλὰ πάντων λέγειν, ὅτι οἴονται τινα καταβήσεσθαι ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν· περὶ δὲ Χριστιανῶν, ὅτι τινὲς αὐτῶν καταβεβηκέναι λέγουσιν. P. 162.

² Ἡμεῖς—οἱ ἀπὸ τῆς ἐπωνύμου Χριστοῦ ἐκκλησίας. Orig. cont. Cels. p. 388.

Origen, in answer to Celsus, having observed, that there were two kinds of Ebionites, who adhered to the observance of the ritual law, one sect of whom believed, and the other denied, the miraculous conception of Christ, asks, Τί τοῦτο φέρει ἐγκλημα τοῖς ἀπὸ τῆς ἐκκλησίας, οὓς ἀπὸ ΤΟΥ ΠΑΛΘΟΥΣ ἀνόμασεν ὁ Κέλσος. L. v. p. 272.

³ By comparing this passage with another, (quoted p. 73 of this Volume), it appears, that the individuals, who entertained this opinion, must have been very few in number.

⁴ C. xiv. p. 45. citat. a Priestley, History of Early Opinions, Vol. III. p. 419. Dr Priestley seems to think this testimony of some weight:

"but,"

Having stated Origen's testimony to the belief of Christians in general, and particularly of the unlearned part of them, in the Divinity of Christ; his obligation to relate the truth may be described in the words of Dr Priestley: "So positive a testimony as this, from so respectable a character (the most so, I will venture to say, that his age, or that any age, can boast) one would have thought, could not have failed to have some weight with persons who had not entirely bid farewell to shame, and who were not determined to support an hypothesis *at any rate*. It is not only the testimony of a man of the greatest purity of character in all respects, but delivered in the face of all the world, who could not but have known it to be a falsehood, if it had been one; and therefore could not have had any other effect than to expose himself. It is, in fact, to suppose that a man of the greatest integrity in the world would tell a lie in circumstances in which the greatest liar would have told the truth. If ever any man had a motive to keep himself within the bounds of truth, it was Origen in this particular case, a man who was considered as at the head of the Christians, and of whom the greatest men, which that and the following age produced, such as Dionysius of Alexandria, Firmilian

"but," he says, "whatever might be the case in the time of Novatian, (when what he says could not be true of any besides the Trinitarians) this certainly was not the practice even with *them* in the time of Origen, *who flourished not more than twenty years before him*."—"According to Origen, the custom of Christians was to pray to God through Christ." History of Early Opinions, Vol. III. p. 419. Dr Priestley is resolved to compel Origen to bear testimony in his favour; whatever the other Fathers may say.

of Cappadocia, and Gregory of Neocæsarea, were the greatest admirers. Would such men as these have been so wonderfully attached, as they are known to have been, to Origen, if he had been a *wilful liar*? Can it then be supposed that such a man as this, in the circumstances in which he wrote, would have asserted concerning the Christians in general, that they were all" believers in the Divinity of Christ, "if it had been notorious (as, if it had been true, it must have been¹") that the great body of them supposed him to have been a mere man?

VIII. Arnobius, (A. D. 303) having mentioned that the heathens object to the worship of Christ by Christians, (*natum hominem colitis*) admits the fact of the worship, but denies, that he was a mere man². Lactantius, (A. D. 303) comparing the heathens with the Christians³, says, that the former are superstitious, in worshipping many and false Gods; but that the Christians are religious, as they supplicate the one, true God: and he observes: “Perhaps any one may ask, how, since we say that we worship one God, do *we nevertheless assert* that there are two, God the Father, and God the Son⁴.” Speaking of an objector against Christianity, this writer observes, “In that (the objector) says that he (Christ) performed miracles, by which principally he obtained the credit of being

¹ Letters to the Bishop of St David's, p. 50.

² Adv. gentes, L. i. ³ L. iv. § 29 and 30.

⁴ Fortasse quærat aliquis, quomodo, cum Deum nos unum colere dicamus, duos tamen esse asseveremus, Deum Patrem et Deum Filium. L. IV. 29.

of Divine nature ; he appears to *agree with us* ; since he affirms the very thing, in which we boast⁵."

IX. Here the testimony to the opinions of the Christians, on the subject of the nature of Christ, may be closed. During the long period between Trajan and Constantine, a number of heathen witnesses, or rather, the whole Roman world agree in the same accusation : they represent the belief of Christ's Divinity as constituting one part of Christianity, and not a single voice is raised among them, at the time that they speak of all Christians as common, unlearned people, to contradict this prevailing notion : the learned and the ignorant among the heathens, the violent and the moderate, the benevolent and the malignant concur in this : those, who condemn it as a crime, those, who laugh at it as a folly, and those, who incidentally notice it as an indifferent matter, speak of the fact, as if it had never been doubted, or disputed. If we examine the witnesses on the other side, their testimony is equally full and extensive. The Christian apologists and others, without a single exception, expressly admit, or silently acquiesce in, this part of the heathen accusations, at the time that they correct misrepresentations on other subjects : they openly avow the belief of Christians in general, particularly of the common people, in the Divinity of Christ ; and labour to prove the reason-

⁵ Quod ait, portentifica illum opera fecisse, quo maxime divinitatis fidem meruit ; assentiri nobis jam videtur ; cum dicit eadem, quibus nos gloriamur. L. IV. 13.

ableness of their faith. Christianity was then thought a crime: and the truth or falsehood of many of the accusations, which were brought against the Christians, may be proved with as much certainty, as if they had been arraigned and tried in a court of justice. When a multitude of witnesses against a prisoner is found to agree in attesting the same fact, the general concurrence on one side only is no equivocal mark of truth. When all the indifferent witnesses, and even those who appear in his favour, agree with his accusers; when the prisoner himself, on different examinations, repeatedly avows the same thing, without any prevarication whatever; the charge is proved beyond all question. In a case like this, it will be nugatory to point out a flaw (I am not aware of any) in the deposition of one or two of the witnesses: the body of evidence, which I have stated, is not, I think, to be set aside by weakness, should any be discovered, in a few of its parts. And as to *any* evidence on the other side—we may wait for it, but none will appear.

A small part of the testimony, which has been produced, will probably be thought sufficient to prove the belief of the great mass of Christians, in the second and third centuries, in the Divinity of Christ. And even their interpretation of the New Testament is not to be despised: the sense in which any ancient book was understood by its readers, particularly well-informed readers, only a short time after it was written, being always of some importance¹.

¹ See c. vi. § 1. of this Volume.

“It has been urged, that, if any doctrine is not to be found in the Apostolic writings, no authority of the Fathers can give it a sanction.
This

But the religious opinions of *the common people*, in the second and third centuries, though supposed to have been at variance with those of the learned, have lately been employed as a medium for discovering the religion of *all* Christians in the time of the Apostles, and through that, the true meaning of the New Testament. Those who can satisfy themselves with proving the Unitarianism of the very first Christians from the “simplices” and “idiotæ” of Tertullian, will find it difficult to elude their own reasoning, when it is turned with additional force against themselves. In the beginning of the fourth century, the great body of the Christian people, together with the writers, the rulers of the Church, and the learned in general, believed in the Divinity of Christ: the same opinion had prevailed among Christians at large, whether learned or ignorant, through the third century; and can be distinctly traced back through the second, among all Christians, except two or three extremely inconsiderable sects, up to the time of Justin Martyr, an hundred years after the foundation of Christianity. To say nothing of preceding writers on this subject, we may fairly judge of the opinions of the very first Christians by those of their learned and unlearned successors. The chain, which we see extended from the Council of Nice up to Justin

This is very true. But if any person through frailty and misconception should imagine that any article was of doubtful purport, and attended with obscurity, then the evidence of those, who had conversed with the Apostles and their immediate disciples, must have weight. And those of the second century, who came later, are still sufficiently early to have their opinion admitted.” Bryant, on the Sentiments of Philo Judæus, p. 60.

Martyr, could not suddenly stop there: but must undoubtedly be continued to the first Christian converts. When we read in Tacitus a description of the religious opinions and customs of some ancient German nations, we have no hesitation in reasoning on the supposition of the prevalence of these opinions and customs, near a century before his time. When we know, that a certain system of religion was taught by the Druids in this island, in the time of Julius Cæsar, we readily admit its existence at a still earlier period, some years beyond the reach of history. And when we find the Divinity and pre-existence of Christ taught by the writers, and believed by the common people, from the time of Justin Martyr down to the Council of Nice, we may conclude with great probability, from this consideration alone, that this was the common faith of Christians from the foundation of the first Christian Church at Jerusalem A. D. 33, to the time of Justin's conversion A. D. 133¹.

The historical fact relating to the opinions of the first Christians, which one writer has attempted to establish², and which another has recommended to

¹ For the other evidence to the opinions of the Gentile Christians in the Apostolic age, see c. xv, xvi, xvii, and xviii. of this Volume.

² "The proper object of my work is to ascertain what must have been the sense of *the books of Scripture*, from the sense in which they were actually understood by those, for whose use they were composed, and to determine what must have been the sentiments of the Apostles by means of the opinions of those who received their instruction from them only." Priestley's Letter to Parkhurst, p. 2. "This historical discussion, when the nature of it is well considered, cannot but be thought to decide concerning the whole controversy: for, if it be true, as I have endeavoured to prove by copious historical evidence, that the great body of unlearned Christians continued to be simply Unitarians till the second and third century, it will hardly be doubted, but that their instructors, viz. the Apostles

our notice as a *discovery*, being reversed, the inference respecting the true meaning of the New Testament must be changed with it. "It cannot be doubted but that the primitive Christians really thought that their opinions (whatever they were) were contained in the Scriptures; as these were the standards to which they constantly appealed³."—"They were in possession of the Books of the New Testament, and for their use they were written⁴:" and their interpretation of these Books, is determined by their religious opinions.

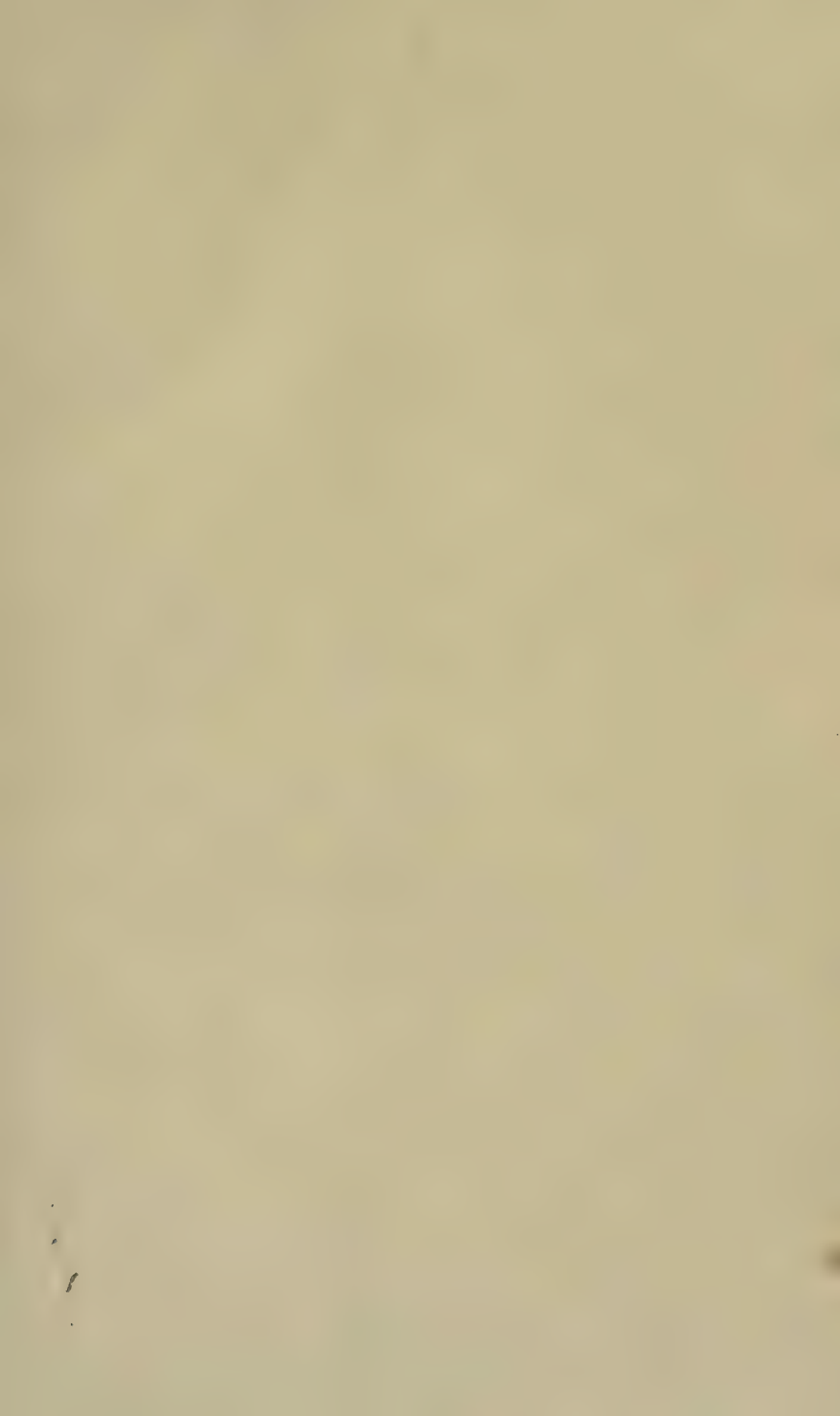
Apostles and first disciples of Christ, were Unitarians also, and therefore that no other *interpretation of the Scriptures* than that of the Unitarians, as opposed to that of the Trinitarians or Arians, *can* be the true one." Preface to Letters to Dr Horne.

³ Priestley's Letter to the Dean of Canterbury, p. 8.

⁴ Letter iv. to Dr Price, in Defence of Unitarianism, for 1787—1790.

THE END.







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